

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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CHAPTER XLVII. A LOVER'S PLEADING.

IN another room of the Warren Austin was debating within himself whether he could confide to his mother his secret about Grace.

He felt that he could not settle down to any profession or any occupation without trying to discover the mystery of Grace Evans's refusal. His mind constantly wandered back to the quiet German town where the two girls were working hard for their daily bread—working and perhaps failing. Who now would help Grace? Who would now come to her rescue in difficulty?

She had certainly mentioned a friend. Who was that friend? Austin conjured up many impossibilities; but to him these fancies seemed so real, so terrible, that he found that his life was becoming unbearable.

Outwardly, of course, he behaved as a rational being; indeed, he was already talked about in the neighbourhood as a young man worth making up to! Of course, he would never be as rich as young Harry Laurence, whose father and mother had always been saving for him; still the young ladies of the neighbourhood had declared him to be a "nice fellow," very superior to his sisters, who were stuck-up beauties, for Minnie's airs and graces had caused her sisters to be included in the same verdict. Captain Grant might have advised Austin; but there was some-

thing in the straightforward Captain that almost prevented confidence. He would hardly understand Austin's peculiar courtship, and he certainly would not understand Austin having made a secret of it.

No, there was but one way out of the difficulty; he must tell his mother everything, and then beg her to let him go to Germany and once more seek out Grace Evans. To-night he had finally resolved upon this course of action, but for several reasons he still hesitated. Would she be too much amazed at the news, for Austin had also noticed that his mother looked ill and careworn, though she only put it down to several bad nights and anxiety about the wedding? She declared it was nothing more serious, and she seemed really annoyed when her looks were noticed.

But, for his own sake, Austin felt he should be far happier if he could make a clean breast of his feelings, and ask his mother for help and advice. She would, of course, be much surprised, and might wonder at him for choosing a girl who was only a poor teacher; but, on the other hand, he could never remember his mother having refused him anything upon which he had set his heart. She had always been a good mother to him, so that now, on consideration, he blamed himself for not having trusted her sooner. Well, he would do so this very evening.

"Mother, are you very much engaged to-night?" he said, when she rose to go to her own room. "I want to have a talk with you."

Mrs. Gordon looked up at him quickly, almost suspiciously Austin fancied. He could not bear to be distrusted, so that look decided him; she should know everything.

"No, I am not much engaged this

evening, dear boy. I really think that all important affairs are settled. Colin has been so considerate and so kind and generous. Dear Bee will be well provided for in case anything happens. One hates to think of such things; but when one has to be father and mother both to one's children, the poor mother has to be worldly wise."

"I wish I could spare you, mother," Austin said, earnestly. "You see, all my life I have depended on your doing exactly the right thing, and now, instead of leaning on you, I ought to be working for you."

This conversation took place in the drawing-room when the rest of the family had departed and Captain Grant had retired to the library. Mrs. Gordon looked round to assure herself they were alone, then she drew a chair near to her for Austin to sit down.

"Poke the fire, Austin, and make a blaze. Thank you. Well, now we are alone we can have our talk."

She could not help feeling a certain pride in Austin's last remark. Yes, she knew she had been a good mother to her children, but deep down in her mind there was one little "only." Would Austin have acted as she had done about those unfortunate girls? But again, as before, she put away the idea with a slight effort of her strong will. Austin sat down, hardly knowing how to begin the conversation, and yet determined that it must be done.

"Your money cares are at least over now Bee is so happily settled for. Grant is a first-rate fellow and will be another son to you."

"Sons-in-law are not often much comfort," she said, smiling; "still, he is a good fellow." "Not to be compared with my boy," was her mental remark. "As to this property, I have got everything straight at last, and there is enough to spare so that you may choose your future career."

"That is just what I wished to talk about. I must do something to carve out my own fortunes, because, if I married—"

"Is that your idea?" said his mother, smiling. "Well, of course, if you marry, we must hope the lady will help somewhat with the fortune."

"But if she did not do so, mother."

All at once Mrs. Gordon knew that the deed was done, and that Austin was not heart-whole.

"Tell me everything, my boy." In spite of herself, there was a sharp pang

of jealousy in the mother's heart. She had been for so long Austin's first thought that it was difficult to think kindly of another influence; but of course, if it were for her boy's happiness, she knew she would accept it; even if she were poor, she must make the sacrifice. "Why did you not speak sooner? Cannot you trust your mother?"

"I ought to have known you better," he said, reproaching himself. "I ought to have known that you would be my best friend in difficulty; but it is very hard to speak of what is nearest one's heart—you will understand that." Mrs. Gordon nodded; she had some troubles which she certainly could not put into words.

"I think you have guessed already," he said, looking into her questioning face, "that, as people say, I have met my fate."

"She must be worthy of you, Austin, before I give my consent," answered Mrs. Gordon in a tone of gentle banter, in order to make her boy feel at his ease; "and I fear I shall be hard to satisfy on that score."

"Of course you are partial, but she is worthy of marrying some one far better than I am. She is——"

No, he could not rhapsodise about Grace, and he felt that his mother might perhaps not understand him.

"But all this time I have not heard her name or where she lives, you moon-struck boy," and Mrs. Gordon stroked her boy's strong, firm hand.

"I met her abroad. Wasn't it strange that I should do so by mere chance? Such things make one believe in marriages being made in heaven, don't they?"

Of course Mrs. Gordon assented, though her real sentiment was that marriages were first settled on earth, but she never willingly differed from Austin, and was accustomed to agree with her lips if not in her heart.

"I saw her first by chance, as we were walking in the streets of Unterberg; and the moment I looked into her face I knew she was the woman I could love."

In spite of herself, a sudden flush overspread Mrs. Gordon's face; she had a momentary fear.

"But what is her name, Austin? I suppose she has one."

"Of course; but that will tell you nothing. It is quite a common name—Evans—but for all that she is not a common type of woman, far otherwise, only

she has no money; and though that makes no difference to my feelings, I feel that for your sake, mother, I ought to get something to do at once—the sooner the better—because I don't mean to depend on you at all or to rob you of your comforts. Besides, Minnie and Frances may fall in love with poor men, and then you will have to help them. They must be your first care."

Mrs. Gordon's sudden fear had been quickly allayed, and she was once more herself—a disappointed self, it is true, because she had selected one or two suitable heiresses as likely to suit him; but this boy of hers had always acted contrary to her wishes, and in spite of that had turned out better than any other only son she was acquainted with; so, as usual, she resigned herself to Austin's whim, with only a little sigh of disappointment.

"Of course, Austin, I should have liked to have known and seen your ideal a little before it was all settled; but one's children do not always think of such little prejudices. Well, dear boy, tell me all about Miss Evans. What are her people; gentlefolk, of course, I hope?" for another terrible possibility had arisen in her mind.

"Her people are in England, I suppose; she was only studying German at Unterberg with a sister, and teaching English; but of course there is no doubt about her being a lady; not that I ever asked her any questions on the subject, for what difference would it make to me? She herself is everything that is perfect—more of a lady than any girl I have seen here."

"But my dear Austin, you would not like to be swamped with vulgar relations. I am sure you would never get on with people of that sort."

"Anyhow, mother, set your mind at rest about the appearance of your future daughter-in-law; only—and this is a terrible fact—she won't have me, and I must go and try my luck again."

This possibility cheered Mrs. Gordon wonderfully. There was a chance then of this mere nobody not marrying her boy; at the same time she felt indignant that an unknown Miss Evans should have refused her Austin!

"I suppose there was some one else on the tapis. I conclude from what you say that her face is her fortune."

"Yes; but, mother, say that this time I may take your consent with me."

"I don't think my refusal would be much good, Austin," smiled Mrs. Gordon, once more the loving mother.

"Yes, it might hinder our marriage; but even that, mother, could not change my mind. Grace must be my wife or no one."

"Grace," echoed Mrs. Gordon, dreamily. Curious it should be that name; she was even sorry that Austin's choice was not a Mary or a Lucy; Grace reminded her of the girl she wished to forget.

"Grace. Isn't it a pretty name? Not that that matters much; names generally fit their owners, and not the owners their names. After Bee's wedding I shall go to Unterberg and settle the question once for all."

"Yes, once for all; and then, Austin, you must come home and help me to look a little after the property; I am not as active as I was at Longham."

"Of course I will, mother; you must come first. Men are selfish wretches when they are in love. I have been so much worried by the idea that Grace wanted me, for she has had a great deal of trouble for one so young, that I can't get her out of my head. Her sister Sibyl is a great charge."

Mrs. Gordon turned deadly pale; she felt as if she had received a severe blow. There might be many Graces, but there would not be many sisters with these two names at Unterberg; besides, at this moment she recollected Miss Evans's existence—she remembered, as if it were yesterday, the gaunt figure of the stern, bad-tempered governess.

Grace and Sibyl Evans. There could be no doubt about the matter. Austin—her Austin had fallen in love with the one girl on earth she would not accept as a daughter-in-law. Quick as lightning the widow took her resolve; she would prevent this marriage; happily there was yet time. Austin should never marry James Gordon's unacknowledged daughter! Never!

"Did you say she had a sister Sibyl? Grace and Sibyl Evans. My dear Austin, I know about those girls. My friend, Mrs. Johnson, knew the people who kept a school there, and I remember that those girls were to go to that place, and altogether there was a sad story about them. It has only just occurred to me, and indeed, Austin, I will never give my consent to your marriage with that girl."

Mrs. Gordon was visibly excited; she rose from her chair and stood up with her hand on the mantelpiece, whilst the fire which burnt low in the grate suddenly flickered up. Austin was quite unprepared

for his mother's sudden change of manner and tone—unprepared, too, for the vehemence of her refusal.

"Mother, I don't understand. What is the story?" Ah! after all, there was some terrible story behind it all; he knew that Grace had implied it, and he had refused to believe it. How strange that his mother should know all about it. Fate was altogether against him. At this moment he felt almost stunned.

"I cannot talk about it, Austin; it would be most painful for you. Only believe your mother that this Grace Evans is quite out of the question, and, I must say it, even as your wife, I could never receive her here."

"Mother, you don't understand what you are saying. You don't know her—I am sure you do not. Whatever history you may have heard, she knows nothing about us. I often talked of you to her; she would love you—I feel sure she would; and whatever this story may be, it cannot touch her personally."

Austin was pleading with his mother as he had never pleaded before—pleading for the woman whom he loved, even though he knew not if she would accept him.

But then he knew nothing about the circumstances, and he might have spared his pleading.

"No, Austin, I have never refused you anything reasonable all your life; you have been a good son, and I hope I have been a good mother, but there are some things from which, for your own sake, I must save you. Nothing will alter my decision. You must choose between Miss Grace Evans and—and—your mother."

"Mother!" Austin could not understand this warmth of feeling about Grace, whom a few moments before his mother had almost welcomed. It must be something very terrible that thus moved her, and yet, whatever it was, he could not agree to it. Grace might or might not be his, but he would never give her up till all efforts had been tried—yes, till from her own lips he had heard the reason of her refusal.

"Yes, I tell you again, Austin, and I do not wish you to ask me to relent, because it is impossible. You can cast me off if you choose, I cannot prevent it; but there will be no other way if you still hold to this foolish fancy."

"I really think you must be mistaken in Miss Evans's identity," said Austin, trying to find a loophole of escape, though

his heart told him that by some strange coincidence his mother did know about his Grace. Yes; and that was, perhaps, why Grace had been so startled at hearing his name. Grace, too, had some knowledge of this name, some previous acquaintance with his mother. What could it possibly be?

"No, I feel sure I am not; the sister's name, her own, all point to—the person I refer to."

Austin began to feel angry. He could not help thinking he was being treated as a child; where was the need of mystery? What was bad in it was not capable of being applied personally to Grace.

"I think you are unfair to me," he said, in a low voice; but almost immediately repented having spoken the words, for never in his life had he seen his mother look so much pained, and he felt his fault keenly, when she said in a chilling tone:

"It is getting late, Austin, I must go to bed." She took up a bedroom candlestick. "And perhaps we had better leave further discussion of this subject till after Bee's wedding. I do not feel equal to any scenes just now."

Austin looked at his mother, and his conscience reproached him still more, for it was true she did look unnerved; he had never seen her so pale and so much agitated. Instead of helping her and being a comfort to her, he had grieved her.

"Yes, you are right, mother. I was wrong to begin on this subject at this moment; but I fancied we might all be happier if everything was open between us. I cannot think that any good comes of mysteries."

"Indeed!"

Mrs. Gordon said this in a chilling voice, and walked away without another word. She was thoroughly vexed, and Austin, after sitting some time in the empty room trying to see his way out of these perplexing affairs, went back to the library, where Captain Grant sat, having taken down some of James Gordon's books to while away the time, quite unconscious of the scene that was taking place between mother and son.

"There are some very valuable volumes of travels here," he began, as Austin entered, and it was was perhaps fortunate for Austin that he had to discuss the various merits of books and their editions, instead of dwelling longer on his own troubles; so it was only after every one had retired to bed that he was

enabled to indulge in a brown study, which long meditation was, however, quite useless, and led him to no conclusion. It was nearly one o'clock before he slowly rose and stepped softly up the broad carpeted stairs. He had to pass his mother's door, and also Bee's room, before reaching his own. Not wishing to wake any one, Austin trod as softly as possible, so as not to arouse the sleepers. What, then, was his surprise when, just as he was passing Beatrice's door, it was gently but quickly opened, and his sister stood before him in her dressing-gown, holding a candle in her hand, and looking as pale and frightened as if she had seen a ghost!

"Austin, is that you? I have been waiting for you so long; I must speak to you. Come in, please. Oh, Austin, Austin!" and he followed her quickly with a strange, new feeling of coming evil.

"Beatrice, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"No, not that; but come in and see for yourself!"

DAVIS'S DISCOVERY.

A COMPLETE STORY.

I ALWAYS did dislike Simpkins. If there is one thing of the truth of which I am entirely convinced, it is of the veracity of that statement.

And the next fact, of the truth of which I am equally well assured, is that Simpkins detested me with corresponding fervour.

He is a prig, is Simpkins, and apparently possessed of the firm opinion that the world revolves round him; that he, Simpkins, is the pivot upon which everything depends; and if other people don't, or won't, see it they are purblind idiots. I have no doubt that if you asked Simpkins his unblinded opinion of myself, he would give the same description of me as I have just applied to him—he might even put it stronger; but in any case it would probably amount to the same thing.

"That fellow Gregson," I can imagine him saying—I'm Gregson—"is a confounded jackass! I can't conceive for a moment how any one can possibly see anything in the man, or tolerate such a mass of conceit and ignorance. He's a humbug, sir!"

You see, I ascribe inferior language and a lower way of expressing himself to

Simpkins than I do to myself; but there's no refinement of feeling in him, as any one could tell at a glance from his taste in trousers. Did any one ever see such abnormal checks, such broodingnagian stripes as adorn the lower portion of Simpkins's anatomy? Can't you always judge of a man's character by his clothes? I can; and when a fellow wears a watch-chain heavy enough to restrain the gambols of an average-sized British mastiff, don't you always put him down in your own mind as a cad? I do. But then Simpkins says I'm a cad—that is, he told Jim Turner, who told Hoskins of the Civil Service, who is a particular friend of mine, so. Of course, Hoskins told me. What is one's most particular friend for, except to repeat all the disagreeable comments he hears about you? At any rate, that's what Hoskins does.

"Gregson," he said, "do you know Simpkins says you're an out and out cad, and he doesn't care who knows it?"

"What does it matter what a conceited ass like Simpkins says?" I replied, in the calm and unruffled manner which is peculiar to me, and which some people are born with, and others spend all their lives trying to attain and can't. "What does it matter what he says," I repeated, "so long as I'm not?"

Hoskins was rather taken aback at this.

"Oh, well, you know, you said the same thing of Simpkins."

"That's a very different thing," I replied; "because he is one."

"Oh," said Hoskins, and that was all.

To go back a little, then, you must know that Simpkins and I have never spoken to each other, and are not even supposed to know each other by sight. There seems to be a sort of fate in this. Very often when I call at a house, some one says, "Oh, Mr. Gregson, what a pity! You've just missed meeting Mr. Simpkins—he's only just this moment left." Then I say how very sorry I am, and I dare say when they say the same to Simpkins, he replies in a similar strain; for we both seem to know the same people and frequent the same haunts, which makes it the more remarkable. Sometimes I've been half inclined to think that this avoidance on his part is intentional, and that Simpkins bolts out one way while they are letting me in another. Just the same thing happened when we were boys. He and I both attended the same school, with the

same result; he left at the end of one term, and I came at the beginning of the other. But I was always coming upon traces of him, and he seemed to have left an atmosphere of himself behind, which lasted all my time. Whatever anybody else did—according to the scholastic annals—Simpkins had done better, whatever it might have been. Whether it was football, or Latin verse, or the wholesale consumption of apple tarts, in each and all Simpkins had left a record which it was impossible to beat. This I felt to be hard on me; to have my prowess in the cricket-field, and my capabilities with regard to the assimilation of cheese-cakes compared—and always unfavourably, mind you—with my predecessor's accomplishments in the same line was, to say the least, galling. I grew to hate Simpkins before I ever set eyes on him. I felt sure, even then, that he was a cad, and in this assumption I was quite justified, for he is—that is, he was—or at any rate—well, never mind. It is a very singular thing, but it happens that nearly all my own friends and personal acquaintances are, at any rate, on speaking terms with Simpkins, and so I'm always hearing about him from one or the other of them. For instance, Chalker, who's in the pink tape department, will say to me: "Oh, by-the-bye, Gregson, I met Simpkins out the other night, and took a hand at whist with him; capital game he plays, too—don't trump his partner's best card like you do, old man!" Or take Waggle-tail, who's in something sticky—I forget whether it's glue or guava jelly—he'll say: "What a pity it is, Gregson, that you don't know Simpkins—first-rate fellow, Simpkins—capital company he is, and can tell a good story when he likes, too. He gave us an account of an adventure of his in Ireland, the other evening after supper, that quite took the shine out of your tale about the bathing-machine. You really ought to know him, Gregson; he'd do you no end of good." This is the sort of thing that falls upon a man after a time—after a very short time, too. Yet you would have thought that the world would have been big enough for Simpkins and me, too, but it evidently wasn't from the manner in which he was perpetually getting in the way and blocking up all my particular thoroughfares.

I quite gave up visiting the Tomlinses—nice family, too; three or four daughters, all musical; and the father, a jolly old boy, who kept a good cellar—simply be-

cause they got to know Simpkins. I was always encountering him on the front steps, or clashing up against him on the door-mat—he was sure to be coming away when I was arriving, or putting in an appearance when I was taking my departure. So after a time I gave up going to the Tomlinses altogether, and the next thing I heard was that Simpkins was engaged to the third girl, Roberta—of course, that was the one I preferred—and six months or so afterwards they were married. To think now, that with, I forget how many surplus females in the world, Simpkins and I must both make a set at the same one. [But that is all of a piece with the rest of his behaviour. By this time he and I had got as far as scowling at each other when we met—though each of us still kept up the farce of pretending not to know who on earth the other fellow was. On rainy days, as I passed him sometimes on the way to the station, if I could possibly contrive so that he came in for some of the drippings off my umbrella, it made me feel comparatively cheerful for the rest of the day; whereas, if Simpkins, in taking the wall, could manage to shoulder me into a puddle, I used to fancy that I could hear him snigger to himself as the muddy water squirted up my leg. Well, as I've said before, he married Roberta Tomlins about two years ago—Bob I used to call her before he came on the scene—and the result is twins. Of course, that's Simpkins all over. What did he want with twins more than anybody else? He was bumptious enough without that. Some people might say that he didn't want them, and would have preferred a single edition of himself—they're both boys—but I don't believe that for a moment. Doesn't a double perambulator take up more room than a single one? And don't twins make more noise in the world than one would?

I belong to a club—we both belong to a club, only it isn't the same one. Mine is the "City and Central," his is the "West End Wayfarers." I put up myself for the "Wayfarers," but was black-balled, of course, by Simpkins; and he, at one time, wished to belong to the "City and Central," but was also black-balled, equally, of course, by me. But I know one or two members of the "Wayfarers" and occasionally drop in there as a visitor. I dined there a week or two back with Jack Davis, an old friend of mine, and it was on this occasion that a most remarkable event,

experience, or whatever you like to call it, befell me, which I am about to relate, and which I have all this time been gradually leading up to. Simpkins was there, of course, sitting in one arm-chair, with his feet on another—bestly behaviour, I call it—with his hat on the back of his head, reading the paper.

"There's Simpkins," said Davis, nodding to him; "shall I ask him to join us? He's capital company and a rattling good fellow."

"On no account," I answered in a hurry. "That is to say, not at all; or, if you do, you must excuse me."

"Why, what's the matter with the man?" he asked. "I've always found him most agreeable and gentlemanly; but have it your own way."

And I did. It was a very good dinner Davis gave me—a very good dinner, indeed—if only he hadn't insisted upon talking such nonsense all the time. He's always going in for some ridiculous project, and propounding impossible and unheard-of theories on all sorts of subjects. This time his particular hobby happened to be nothing less than the doctrine of transmigration, with the latest variations. The last time I had met him it had been "Volapuk," and the time before that, "The Moral and Social Elevation of Costermongers." He began with the soup:

"Gregson," he said, "I don't know whether you've ever given your mind to the subject of transmigration?"

"You mean emigration, I suppose," I said, with my mouth full.

"No, I don't; nothing of the kind," he answered, hastily; "I mean neither more nor less than the passing from one state of being to another—the passage of the soul, after death, into another body. Now, I dare say, Gregson," he continued, passing the bottle, "you've never even given a thought to the subject, or felt the slightest curiosity as to what your status in life might have been in a previous condition?"

Davis was quite right, I hadn't.

"Or felt any desire to know what shape or substance you may assume in a future one? For you know, Gregson," impressively, "your present existence will undoubtedly become merged and lost in another, and it may be a widely different phase of being." Here he leant across the table and prodded me in the ribs, to awake my slumbering interest. "You know this won't be the last of you by a

long way—this is merely, so to speak, the outside case, and when you've worn it out, sooner or later, your spirit will pass from it and occupy another, and one, perhaps, not in the least resembling it. You might even be a butterfly, Gregson," he continued, looking at me contemplatively, "or a—or a bulldog, or else be turned out fresh as some other fellow, and start again as a baby in long frocks."

I knew it was of no use contradicting or arguing with him when he'd picked up a new theory, so I merely said I was quite willing to have my remains worked up into some fresh form when I'd done with them—the same as my brother Bob's clothes used to be cut down to fit me, when he had finished wearing them; still, I thought that there would be more than enough stuff left to make a butterfly; in fact, I preferred—if I might be allowed a voice in the matter—the bulldog scheme, as thereby—only I kept this to myself—I might be able to harass Simpkins's calves—only Simpkins, under similar circumstances, wouldn't be himself, and in his next metamorphosis mightn't have any calves to harass.

Davis shook his head and sighed.

"Ah, I was afraid you'd take it in this way—they all do; but I'd expected better things of you, Gregson. Try the claret. Now, do you mean to tell me seriously that it's of no consequence to you whether you pass the next phase of your existence as"—looking round him for inspiration—"as an oyster or a—an omnibus conductor?"

"Not a bit," I answered, staring hard at Simpkins, who had now come in, and was dining at a table opposite. Davis looked at me reproachfully, dropped the subject, and splashed the gravy.

But towards the end of the repast, after the bottle or, I should say, bottles had circulated freely, and the eye of Davis had begun to beam benevolently on surrounding objects, animate or inanimate, and I was conscious myself of a feeling of good fellowship almost towards Simpkins, who was enjoying his dinner as freely as though there were no such circumstances as twins to be considered or provided for in the near future—he picked up the thread of his former argument, and leaning across the table, continued in a low, mysterious tone of voice:

"Gregson, my boy, what would you say, if I told you there was such a thing as transmigration of souls before death?"

"What should I say, Davis?" I replied, facetiously. "I should say that you're a brick, and the claret's first-rate."

He took no notice of my remark, but brought his chair round the table until it was close to mine, and uttered these remarkable words:

"I tell you, Gregson, that it is possible for a man of strong will, under certain circumstances, and by exerting his mental powers to the utmost, to project his spirit and individuality into that of some other person and occupy the outward semblance of another being; and while still retaining his own proper intellectual capacity and existence, to live and move in some different fleshly tenement to his own. It's a most remarkable discovery, this of mine, Gregson, and you're the first I've revealed it to! There's only one circumstance which baffles me, and that is, what becomes of your own proper personality when you're masquerading round in some one else's bones? But for that, I should have tried the experiment myself before this, and projected myself into the outward fabric of—say Mr. Gladstone or the Archbishop of Canterbury; only the question remains, who would take charge of my own body in the meantime? I shouldn't like to leave myself lying about anywhere for fear of mistake—of seeing my name in the police intelligence, or perhaps of even getting buried, under a wrong impression, before I could get back and lay claim to myself. You see, the subject is in itself so vast and opens up such a field for conjecture, that it is almost more than the mind can grasp."

I did see it, or at least tried to look as though I did; but, to tell the truth, I was just then engaged in staring hard at Simpkins, who was now leaning back in his chair and picking his teeth in, what appeared to me, a peculiarly personal and aggressive manner; though, as I looked, it struck me that there was a haziness in his outlines and a want of finish about his features which was unusual to him, or, at any rate, which I had not remarked before. It occurred to me, however, what a joke it would be to—what was the term Davis had made use of?—project myself into Simpkins. It was worth thinking about, and the more I thought about it the more the idea tickled me. To borrow Simpkins's body and turn him out of it—evict him, in short—would be no end of a lark! I could hear Davis still droning away in my ear, but I was too much amused at my own

notion to pay great attention to what he was saying. Simpkins, too, of all men! I suppose we stayed another half-hour or so at the club, and Davis ordered spirits and cigars, of which we both partook. After this Simpkins's outline seemed to become still more blurred and undefined, and at one time it even appeared to me as though there were two Simpkinses.

I mentioned this fact to Davis, as being rather peculiar, and asked him if he had ever heard of Simpkins having a twin brother; but he only laughed and said, "Come along, old chap, we'll get out of this." And then I fancy we left the room, for the last thing I recollect seeing was the twin Simpkinses, each smoking a couple of cigars and imbibing something liquid out of an indefinite number of tumblers, with what seemed like a most unnecessary profusion, not to say bad taste.

The next thing I remember clearly was finding myself in a cab, I suppose, driving homewards, with my mind still harping on Davis's remarkable theory; and then, all at once, a peculiar and indescribable feeling came over me of having on some one else's boots, accompanied also by a strange sensation of some one else's corn on one of my toes. Before I had by any means successfully solved this puzzle, the cab came to a stop before a house—my house, evidently—and though I didn't remember having given the cabman any address, he appeared at the door of the vehicle, and wrenching open the door, announced, "Here you are." So I got out and paid him, and sauntering slowly—in consequence of the undesirable presence of that unexplained corn—up the path to the front door, in which I inserted my latchkey, entered the house. There was a light burning in the hall, but turned down very low in order to economise the gas—so low, in fact, that on advancing towards the umbrella-stand I fell over some large and unfamiliar object, and bruised my shins unmercifully. I made a few secular observations to myself on the subject and proceeded to investigate the stumbling-block. It was a perambulator! Now, what on earth, I thought to myself, does my landlady mean by sticking such a thing as this in the way for me to fall over and nearly break my legs; and who has she got stopping with her that requires such an apparatus? Confound the thing! and I gave it a vicious kick, with a total disregard of consequences and my newly acquired corn. For the next five minutes or so I was fully occupied in hugging my

foot and uttering profanities with reference to that infantile equipage. Then I picked myself up and made for my sitting-room, the door of which was ajar, showing the gas also turned down low and the fire nearly out. In no very good humour, I proceeded to rake the coals together and turn up the gas. Why hadn't the landlady put more coals on before she went to bed, when she knew I hated to come home late and find nothing but a few burnt-out cinders, and the coal-scuttle empty? However, there were the whisky decanter and the biscuits on the table, as usual, and some cold meat; but all the time I was conscious of something different—something I couldn't define. It wasn't the room—that seemed all right—and I knew just where everything was. For instance, in the cupboard on the left-hand side of the fireplace was my tobacco-jar; but was it my tobacco-jar? Why, of course it was. And what was in that tin next to it? Why, condensed milk, of course. I knew it was, without reading the label, only—what on earth did I want with condensed milk? I gave it up as a bad job, as I did several other things which puzzled me, such as a work-basket on a table by the window and a very small pair of—what looked like—doll's socks, apparently undergoing repairs, which couldn't by any possibility belong to me, and yet there was something familiar about them, too, as though I'd seen them before under different circumstances.

Finally I sat down, and, having compounded myself a tumbler of whisky and water, took off my boot to ease my corn. Was it the fact of finding my foot encased in a red sock, when I could have sworn that I never wore anything but black, that caused me to investigate other portions of my attire, and subsequently, on discovering further discrepancies, stand up and review myself in the looking-glass over the mantelpiece? Is it possible by the aid of mere words to chronicle my amazement on finding that the individual therein reflected was not myself at all, but Simpkins? There was his face, with the nondescript sort of nose and sandy moustache which characterized it, and the clothes—those abnormal checks, always associated with him, and that glaring and aggressive necktie—all were his. I thought of the perambulator—a double perambulator, too, if I remembered rightly—over which I had bruised my—that is, Simpkins's—shins, and the work-basket and the socks (doubtless appertaining to one of those before-mentioned

twins), and the condensed milk—they were all his! This, then, was a practical exemplification of the truth of Davis's discovery—this was why things had appeared at once so strange and so familiar—this accounted for the corn on my right foot—I was not myself at all; I was Simpkins!

Davis had distinctly said that a man with a strong will might under favourable circumstances so exert it as to transfer himself, for the time being, into the outward form of any other individual he might fix upon for the purpose. Now, I was undoubtedly a man of strong will. This proved it unmistakeably. I had in some way projected and merged my own individuality into that of Simpkins—had, in fact, become Simpkins. What I had done with my own body I didn't know—whether I'd left it behind at the club or dropped it in the cab—but here I was, with my perambulator in the hall and, in all probability, my twins upstairs in the nursery, their condensed milk on the top shelf of my cupboard, and Simpkins's own particular corn adorning my extremities. Here was a go. To think that I had got a wife and family and—if I remembered rightly—a mother-in-law overhead!

I laughed to myself quietly, for fear of waking the twins, but suddenly remembered a fact which brought my mirth to an untimely conclusion. Suppose I couldn't find my way back again—suppose I was buried under a mistaken impression, and so had no body to get back to—suppose I had to remain as I was for the rest of my natural life! In fact, there was no end to my suppositions, and, thus becoming aware of the serious nature of my position, I set myself firmly to try and will myself back again into my own proper person, wherever that might be. But it was of no good. I could not do it, although I tried for half an hour, until the perspiration streamed off me; so, taking the tumbler of whisky and water at a draught, I sank back exhausted into an arm-chair and fell either asleep or into a state of unconsciousness.

When I awoke, or came to myself, it was morning, the gas was out, and the table laid for breakfast, and by my side there stood a tall, imposing-looking figure, frowning down upon me in intense disapproval. I knew that face and figure. It was Simpkins's mother-in-law, now, alas! mine, as was only too evident from the way in which she addressed me.

"Mis-ter Simpkins—John Edward!

Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Nine o'clock in the morning, and you've not been to bed all night! Nine o'clock in the morning, and you the father of twins, who are at this identical moment being bathed in the room over your head and screaming at the tops of their little lungs—as well they may, dear innocents, with their father not home all night, and no doubt ruining himself at billiards, until the poor dear children won't have so much as a gum-ring left to cut their teeth on before many months are over their heads!"

Overcome by this picture of destitution in the near future, she paused for a moment to take breath, while I hung my head in dejection and dismay at the situation in which I found myself. Truly, if I had known before all about this mother-in-law, I need not have hated and despised poor Simpkins to the extent I had done. Perhaps, after all, it was just as well that he and not I had married the third Miss Tomlins, who now, with indignation on her brow and a twin on each arm, entered the room and proceeded to add her reproaches to those of her maternal parent.

"And, perhaps, you will have the goodness to say where you've been all night, and mamma and I sitting up for you until past twelve, and no one to help me with the children, or rock the cradle or walk up and down with them when they were fractious, so that I never got a wink of sleep until daylight!"

I murmured something about the club, missing the last omnibus, and having to walk home. You see, under the circumstances, I felt obliged to stand up for Simpkins, as what had happened was not his fault at all. I wondered, too, whether this sort of thing happened every time he stopped out late. Poor Simpkins, I felt quite sorry for him! Meanwhile, I pondered, as the two ladies joined forces and vituperated me as to the probable whereabouts of myself. Where was I? Had I been taken up as a "drunk and incapable" or what?

"Club, indeed!" said—I suppose I must, under the circumstances, call her—my mother-in-law. "What do you, a married man, want with a club? I wonder the ceiling doesn't fall in upon you for talking in such a manner!"

If it only would, I thought to myself, and bury you in its ruins!

"Omnibus, indeed!" said my wife, pro tem., "a likely story. I don't believe a word of it!"

"Walk home!" said my wife and mother-in-law together; "you don't deserve to have a home!"

"Or a wife either," continued the elder lady.

"Much less twins," concluded her daughter.

I cowered before the blast and tried to hide my head, like a dissipated ostrich, behind the coffee-urn. Hostilities were abandoned for a few minutes during the entrance of the maid, bearing the matutinal bacon; but were resumed with renewed vigour in consequence of one of the twins—I don't know which, but it was the one with the baldest head and a vicious look in his eye—getting his fist jammed into the milk-jug, and being rescued with much difficulty and the loss of the greater part of its contents.

"A nice father you are!" said my mother-in-law, breaking out again, as the other twin, who had, no doubt, with the best intentions, been endeavouring to cut his teeth on the handle of a fork, accidentally hit himself in the eye, and sent up a howl of anguish to the heavens! "Do you want to see the poor children murdered before your very eyes, and not so much as move a finger to help them? Do leave off staring like a born fool and hold the children for a moment while your wife pours out the coffee!"

I obeyed; that is to say, the two squirming, squealing masses of flabby humanity were deposited one on each knee, and I was bidden to mind what I was about and not turn my poor, dear wife's hair grey with grief by dropping them under the table. To which my poor, dear wife replied, a lot I should care for that, so long as I could carry on with those painted, made-up things at the refreshment bars.

Just then—as I was meditating, in Simpkins's interests, gagging my mother-in-law with the table-cloth and depositing the twins in the coal-scuttle—a diversion was occasioned by the former exclaiming:

"Ah, there he goes! A nice, quiet, gentlemanly fellow. He would never stop out all night playing cards until goodness knows what time and wearing his wife into fiddle-strings! That's the one you ought to have married, Roberta!"

I looked and beheld—myself!—my own head and shoulders, which were all that could be seen of me over the top of the fence, passing the house, evidently on my way to the station. By Jove! there I was, in my light overcoat and top hat, looking,

as I could not help remarking, not at all a bad-looking chap and worth two of Simpkins any day. I tried hard, with my whole heart and soul, to will myself back again; but it was no go. There I continued to sit, with a twin cherub on each knee, and Simpkins's own particular brand of corn harassing my right foot. So she ought to have married him—that is to say, me, ought she? Not if I—that is to say, he—knew it! No, indeed! I—that is, the other fellow—had had a lucky escape, and poor old Simpkins had been the victim instead. Who would ever have thought, though, that Roberta Tomlins would have turned out such a termagant, or that Mrs. T., on the death of her husband, would come and quarter herself on her unfortunate son-in-law, making his life—with the aid of the twins—a howling wilderness? But in the meantime I wanted to know who it was had the infernal cheek to go about dressed up in my flesh and blood? Was it Simpkins? Well, if so, I could hardly blame him, seeing that I had turned him out of his own body. Anyhow, I wasn't dead or being brought up at Bow Street, which was somewhat of a relief. The Greek chorus was still continuing its denunciations and cataloguing my iniquities over my defenceless head; but I scarcely heard or heeded them, until, in the consternation and bewilderment caused by the unexpected appearance of somebody else pretending to be me, I unfortunately allowed the bald-headed twin to anoint himself plentifully with the mustard, with distressing results.

"Inhuman wretch!" shrieked my mother-in-law. "Would you try to destroy your own innocent offspring? Give him to me, sir! You are a brute, and no more fitted to be the father of twins than——"

Something within roused me to sudden fury.

"Confound the twins!" I cried, seizing hold of them by their petticoats. "Who wants twins? I don't!"

I swung them in the air—their skulls came together with a violent crash; I heard them crack like egg-shells amid a chorus of shrieks from their female relatives.

"Now, then, are yer a-goin' to tell me where to drive yer to or not?" There was a rush of cold air upon my face as I once more regained consciousness. The cabman had opened the door of the cab and was confronting me with determination written upon his brow. "Ere 'ave I bin

a-drivin' of yer about for the last hour an' a 'alf, an' not a word o' direction can I git out o' yer, an' I'm tired of it, I am."

Where was I? Who was I? How—Was I Simpkins or myself? And where were the massacred innocents? I felt myself carefully all over, and came to the conclusion that I was back in my own body again. There was no corn on my right foot—it was evident, then, that my spirit had returned to its original clay tenement. I concluded to get out and walk, and having paid a most exorbitant fare, I proceeded to take the rest of my way home on foot. I had passed through a most remarkable experience, and completely proved the truth and practicability of Davis's theory with regard to the doctrine of transmigration. But I didn't want it to occur again; the experiment had proved completely successful, but decidedly unpleasant. I pitied Simpkins from the bottom of my heart, and when I remembered from what he had saved me, I even felt grateful to him. The most remarkable part of it was that it was now only half-past one in the morning. The cabman said he had been driving me about for the last hour and a half. How could I have passed through such an experience as had been mine in that little time? And what had Simpkins been doing in the meanwhile? I must ask Davis the next time I meet him.

I did ask him, and he laughed.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you went to sleep and dreamt it all. I put you into the cab myself, as you seemed—well, a little undecided in your movements, and that's how you came to fancy it all."

"But how about your theory?" I enquired.

Would you believe it possible, but he actually declared that I had dreamt that too!

LAST WORDS.

HUSH, for I am dying,
Let me rest awhile,
Let me think my thoughts in peace.
Soon this labouring breath will cease;
Let me live my life again
Ere I leave its joy and pain.
For Death's angel draweth near me,
On his sable wings to bear me,
Where! ah, where! who knows? and yet,
Spite my anguish of regret,
Spite my load of dull despair,
I could pass in joy—if there
He, my best beloved, might greet me
On the deep, dark river meet me.
Then, I think I could forgive
All that spoiled the life I live.
Hush, for I am dying.

Hush, 'tis all returning,
Coming back to me.
Once again the moon shines down
On Ben Netre's sullen frown;
On the loch the moon is spreading
Silver pathways for her treading,
And we linger, he and I,
While beneath the listening sky,
He murmurs passionate words that say,
"Love will never pass away."
Then the scene is changed to snow,
The lonely hearth, the fire's dull glow,
Where I sit, and dream how he
Promised to come back to me,
Swore false vows and went; we twain
Never met on earth again.

Hush, for I am dying,
And he, why he has won
Ruby Rosslyn's lovely hand,
Weighted well with gold and land.
I had naught but love to yield,
I, the child of moor and field,
An Argyllshire peasant lass.
Ah, how happy then I was!
Ere in blind, blind love I gave
All I had, to be his slave.
I thought my baby's smile might win
A trembling joy from grief and sin,
But ere my bud to blossom burst
God took it from me, to be nursed
By angel hands; and I, and I,
Alone and stricken down, must die.

Oh, Harry, Harry, could you make
No other pastime than to break
A true heart for a moment's whim?
Hush, for the world is growing dim.
"The old, old story," men will say,
And shake grave heads, and turn away.
"Folly and wrong," I know, I know,
But oh, my God, I loved him so!

THROUGH THE LAND OF THE LAMAS.

THE romance of mystery has always lain about Thibet—the Land of the Lamas—long before it became associated with Mahatmas, and that Neo-Buddhism of which one hears so much in these days. Few Europeans have penetrated the country, and that is one reason why fertile imaginations have been able to locate so many wonders in it. Then it is a sort of dependency of China—itsself a land of mystery—and has been used by that Empire very much as a kind of political buffer between its confines and those of Britain-in-Asia. Lastly, it is the centre, almost the shrine, of the oldest religion in the world, still professed in various forms by about one-third of the world's inhabitants.

What little we do learn about Thibet does not lead us to suppose it to be a very attractive country. It is a mountainous and not very hospitable region, and the occupations of its people are chiefly pastoral. For the rest it is probably the most priest-ridden land on the face of the earth—only the priests are called Lamas.

In the spring of 1889, Monsieur Gabriel Bonvalot, who had just returned from that journey over the Pamir into India which is famous, began to have visions in Paris of a journey right across Asia, through Thibet, to the shores of the China Sea—in fact, from Paris to Tonquin by land. When his intentions became known, the Duc de Chartres asked him to allow his son, the young Prince Henry of Orleans, to be his companion in the adventure. The traveller and the Prince left Paris in the height of the season of the Great Exposition, picked up at Moscow a Turkish servant of Bonvalot's, who had been his companion on former journeys, and with the utmost expedition crossed the Ural Mountains, traversed Siberia, and reached Djarkend, the last town in Russian territory, where the caravan had to be made up and the staff recruited for the journey through Thibet and China.*

The range of the Tien-Shan, or Celestial Mountains, has to be crossed, after leaving Kuldja, a place the name of which was famous in Asiatic politics a few years ago. This is a step into Mongolia, and Turkestan being left behind, the beardless faces, sunken eyes, and the long dresses of the men show that China has been entered, although at its extremest north-western limit. Here, however, is also a floating population of Siberian Kirghis, who have been attracted over the frontier by the excellence of the pasture in the basin of the Ili, who act under their own chiefs, and who, as Mussulmans, do not scruple to rob and plunder the native Mongols, who, as Buddhists, are regarded as unworthy the consideration of a believer in the Koran and a follower of the True Prophet. Sometimes the Chinese authorities are roused to measures of retaliation, but in a general way the Kirghis interlopers seem to rule the roost.

Nevertheless, the Chinese have very cleverly obtained a certain hold over these rough and ready Siberian emigrants. They have so managed that every Kirghis who wants to visit a town must first obtain from his chief a small tablet containing his name in three characters. These tablets are provided by the Chinese Government, and are a sort of passport with which the Kirghis is safe, but without which he is, in times of disturbance, liable

* A translation of M. Bonvalot's narrative, "De Paris au Tonkin à travers le Tibet Inconnu," has been published under the title "Across Thibet," in two handsome illustrated volumes, by Messrs. Cassell and Co., Limited.

to be arrested by the Mongols and subjected to the most terrible punishment. There is thus, after all, a sort of bond of law over these lawless tribes.

Leaving behind the Kirghis settlements, the travellers find themselves in a purely Buddhist country—a land in which people believe in the transmigration of the soul, but pay very little respect to the body after death. Here is obtained the first experience of the Lamas, the great priest-class of Thibet. They have come down from their monastery and are living in tents on the plain, in order to get in the harvests before winter. A visit of ceremony is paid to the Grand Lama, the head of the monastic establishment.

"The Grand Lama received us very affably at the entrance of his tent of white felt, which was larger than any of the others. He himself drew aside the curtain and invited us into his residence; and we, as soon as we had entered, seated ourselves in Eastern fashion to the left of the aperture. The yellow-looking little man asked us as to our health, offered us the services of his doctor, and talked to us in the most paternal and friendly tone. Leaving an interpreter to answer for us, we proceeded to inspect at our ease, but with due discretion, this incarnation of Buddha and his abode. The Grand Lama appeared to be about sixty. Like all the priests of his creed, he wears his hair short, and being beardless by nature he has no need to shave. His features are regular, especially by comparison with those of his doctor. He has rather a broad face, but the black eyes are very intelligent, the mouth is delicate, and the eyelids very clearly defined. He is easy in his gestures and has a good deal of unction in his voice. I should not be at all surprised if he ruled the fraternity excellently, for he gives the impression of being a man of mark."

The monastery is merely a collection of Mongolian houses arranged in a square. The architecture is of the simplest—four walls, a door, a window, a fireplace, a hole in the ceiling, a thatched roof. The furniture consists of a few chests, some rugs and mats, and some tools. The Lamas prefer to live in their felt tents as long as possible, sometimes even erecting them in the courtyard of the monastery.

The pagoda is a [sort of rectangular barn with whitewashed walls. The most prominent thing in the interior is the altar, upon which burning lamps cast a glow upon two gilded statues—one of a smiling

Buddha, the other of a smiling Lama. In a side chapel is the statue of the successor of the Grand Lama, whose function seems to be to act as a sort of mediatory saint, to intercede for the faithful, and to see that their prayers are duly transmitted. The altar is covered with packets of sacred books and relics of various kinds from the holy city of Lhasa. The faithful are summoned to prayers by the striking of a cymbal, which instrument also serves as an organ to accompany the devotions.

The fact that the two sides of the pagoda are used as a warehouse illustrates a curious feature of Lamaism. The Lamas—although M. Bonvalot says nothing of this—practically monopolise the trade of Thibet, both export and import, and regulate the currency. Whatever is worth having is retained by the priesthood, who are very numerous, and the lay masses live in poverty and dirt.

"As to the women," says our fastidious Frenchman, "they exceed in ugliness anything which can be imagined; and one cannot help wondering how the most ardent of poets would contrive to idealise them."

The Buddhists do not confine their devotions to the pagodas. On the sides of a mountain in the Tien-Shan range are seen inscriptions from the sacred books in such huge letters that they can be read miles off. Again, all over the country the traveller is continually meeting with obos, or heaps of stones upon which prayers have been engraved.

A word of description must be given to these obos. They are heaps of stones, rough cairns, usually placed on an eminence, or at some point on the road at which man and beast will most naturally halt for breath. At these halting-places it is usual for the wayfarer to take his meals and offer up a few prayers, either for the journey passed or for that in prospect. The first man gathered a heap of stones, by way of showing respect to Buddha, and stuck a pole on the top, and those who followed added more stones. Then came travelling Lamas, specially employed for the service, who engraved prayers upon slabs, and added them to the cairn. Thus the obo is established, and all passers-by—shepherds as well as Lamas—add to it constantly.

On a much frequented road an obo becomes colossal, and on some of them images of Buddha may be found. Some worshippers deposit carved fragments of horn, pieces torn off their clothes, or any

odd trifle—making the presentation while saying their prayer.

That prayer is the mysterious and invariable "Om mané padmé hum," which night and day for thousands of years has been uttered from millions of human throats, and spun upon millions of revolving wheels, in this land of Buddha. Literally interpreted, it means, "O the Jewel in the Lotus! Amen." But what that means, and why it has to be said incessantly by the believer, no one seems to know. Perhaps, as with the blessed word "Mesopotamia," there may be a soothing satisfaction in the mere articulation of the syllables.

The prayer-mills of Thibet are of various kinds. Some are carried in the hand, and turned industriously while the devotee is on the march or looking after his flocks; others are turned by the wind. In the Lama-house at Doton is a curious series of enormous bobbins, composed of printed prayers, and suspended on a spindle between two beams. There are one hundred bobbins, and each bobbin contains one thousand prayers. They are turned by hand, and no one enters without giving them a spin, so that the brain reels in the attempt to form a statistical computation of the praying capacity of this Lama-house.

Of one place where prayer windmills are seen, M. Bonvalot writes: "On the roof of the habitation of the Lamas are windmills turning prayers and likewise tridents of metal, which have led people to believe that Lamaism was derived from the worship of Neptune, the ruler of the waves. The little column supporting this trident is covered with stripes of black and white stuff. We also see a big T, surmounted by a crescent, bearing on the concave side two spheres placed one above the other. At one extremity of the bar of the T hangs a little bell."

The Chinese authorities tried to prevent M. Bonvalot and the Prince from crossing over into Thibet at all, but did not succeed. The Lamas, however, did prevent the travellers from reaching the holy city of Lhasa, which therefore still remains as mysterious as when Prjevalsky, the Russian, risked his life to reach it.

At Tcharkalik, where a pause had to be made for some time to replace the men who had been engaged in Russia for the journey up to this point only, Prince Henry leaves the camp to explore on his own account the country of the Lob Nor. This is a lake discovered and described by Prjevalsky, which now seems rapidly

shrinking into the desert. According to tradition, there was once a vast inland sea here without reeds or sedge. More recent traditions refer to a series of large lakes. Prjevalsky saw one lake. The Prince found no lake, and was told that the River Tarim dwindles away and finally disappears. Old men with whom the Prince conversed said that the water has been receding every year, and that it must be absorbed by the salt-petre, for this is a veritable region of salt. The Prince adds another and a shrewd explanation. He says that for the last ten or twelve years Chinese Turkestan has ceased to be the theatre of war it formerly was. Now that the country is pacified the inhabitants are devoting themselves to the cultivation of the fields, and in order to irrigate these fields they have diverted the waters of the Tarim. The whole subject is very curious, and the Prince's account of his adventures is bright and interesting.

Touching the inhabitants (Mussulman) of the Lob Nor district, Prince Henry tells that except from the diseases incidental to the excessive dampness of the region they are healthy enough. "When a marriage takes place, the father of the bridegroom gives the father of the bride ten bundles of wild hemp, ten packets of dried fish, ten cups of fish oil, a stewpan, twenty or thirty loaves of bread, from fifty to a hundred ducks, a flint and steel, and a boat." This is the ordinary tariff, the rich giving a few additional fish and ducks. The eatables are, moreover, consumed at the wedding-feast. The reader might gather from this list of presents that the principal occupation is shooting and fishing. They can neither read nor write, and the traditions of the country are handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another. Some of these traditions comprise lofty ideas, for these people, though very poverty-stricken, are not savages. They are religious, and declare themselves proud of being Mahomedans, this constituting one of the reasons for their contempt of the Chinese and Mongols, whom they describe as people having "no book." Their religious practices consist in listening to a few verses of the Koran recited by one of the elders of the tribe; their services are simple, being limited to burials. When a man dies, his hands and feet are tied, and if his family has any cloth, a new garment is made for him; but if not, he is dressed in an old one. An elder recites a few Mussulman prayers, and the corpse is placed on a stretcher made of reeds and

osiers; it is then covered with rushes and placed in the midst of the reeds, and the relatives cut more reeds and heap them on the dead body; a pole bearing a bit of paper at the end is fixed in the ground, and so the ceremony ends.

This excursion, however, was made before the party reached Thibet, and while the Chinese authorities were endeavouring to prevent their further progress. That progress was slow, toilsome, and difficult, through a desert of mountains—first a pass, then a valley, then a lake, then a pass again—with no defined or definable road, and with only a general idea of direction.

It is amazing the amount of physical toil and suffering men will voluntarily undergo who are bitten by the craze for travel. In crossing this waste of desert mountains, in order to reach the Thibetan tableland, the travellers had to ascend to an altitude of over eighteen thousand feet, where all suffered from mountain-sickness, where there was no water, and where the food they carried with them could not be cooked properly on account of the intense cold. There were times when the temperature fell to forty degrees below zero, and the atmospheric conditions were such that the finger-nails snapped off, wood broke like glass, the beard ceased to grow, the skin cracked, and the lips swelled. Two of the native servants succumbed to the rigours of this terrible journey, all the horses perished, and also several of the camels. At one point was seen a frozen geyser thirty-three feet high.

The very rare human inhabitants encountered in crossing this mountain range were not prepossessing in appearance. They are veritable savages to look at—more like bears than men—with their tattered sheepskin clothing, their sunken faces, their thin bodies, and their claw-like hands. They are small and thick-set, of a Turco-Mongolian type (probably offshoots from the Turcoman tribes).

A curious case of mountain-sickness and superstition combined is related of a Chinese servant with the expedition. One day he had made himself a cap of fox skin, and the same day he was seized with violent pains in the head and inflammation of the glands of the neck. Here was cause and effect most evident! But the foolish man had forgotten that, on the very day before he put on the new cap, they had been caught in a severe storm which drenched them. He had simply caught cold; but concluding that the cap was the

cause of all the mischief, he put it away and travelled with some thin stuff on his head. In such weather the consequence was that the inflammation spread to his ears and cheeks, and the man was in a very bad way, owing to his superstition. He was, therefore, ordered, with threats of a good flogging if he disobeyed, to put on the fur cap again and pull it well down over his ears, while some ointment was applied to the swelling. In a few days he began to get well again in spite of the cold and wind, and yet, if left to himself, he would probably have died rather than have resumed the covering which he fancied to be the cause of the evil.

Here is a specimen of the first Thibetans met with after the mountains are passed.

A very little man, with clean-shaven face covered with a layer of grease and smoke and furrowed by a great number of wrinkles. His deep-sunken eyes are little more than dark spots beneath the swollen eyelids. The narrow face is framed in the long locks of hair which fall down upon the hollow cheeks. The nose is large, the mouth toothless, the lips thick, and the chin square and hairless. With a small and dirty hand he constantly manipulates a horn snuff-box, out of which he inhales powdered red tobacco. He is dressed in an unspeakably dirty sheep-skin pelisse, and for head covering he has a strip of skin wound round the forehead and fastened at the back, but leaving the top of the head bare. From the crown hangs a tress of hair reaching to the loins, excessively greased, and kept in place by two or three bone rings. His pelisse is fitted to the figure, and is looped up by a cord to the waist to facilitate his walking. In this fold he carries his provisions and snuff-box, as also a small spinning-wheel.

An abandoned tent gives a fair idea of what a Thibetan interior is like. Stones are put together in the form of a square as a sub-structure for the tent. In the centre is an oven made of clay and flat stones, and in a corner is a box for holding fuel—dry dung. A mill and a saddle, both very primitive in design, form the rest of the furniture, with, perhaps, a rough basket and the skull of a yak converted into a bowl. The tent is made of a sort of black woollen stuff like felt, covers about four yards square, and is secured at the corners by pegs attached to other pegs by ropes that can be tightened or loosened as required. An opening at the back allows of the exit of the smoke.

The ambassadors, who were sent out to the travellers from Lhasa, are much more attractive beings. Their costumes and those of their attendants are clean, and they ride excellent horses. They bring small presents, including a native spirit made from barley, and not unpalatable; and their manners are good. One Lama is dressed in yellow silk and is decorated with a bright blue button.

These are the envoys of the Talai Lama, the highest religious authority in Thibet, and of the Amban of Lhasa, the greatest civic personage—a sort of Secretary of State. The object is to dissuade the travellers from approaching any nearer to Lhasa, and to induce them to take a more circuitous road to Batang, from which they can easily reach the Red River and Tonquin.

The Amban himself rides out from Lhasa, with a large following, in order to parley with them. He is a man with broad face and black, European-looking eyes. His lips are thick, his nose straight and broad, his forehead prominent, his hair plaited and done up in bands like a woman's. He is evidently a man of considerable intelligence, and of pleasing manners. He is accompanied by many Lamas and chiefs, and also by the Chinese resident Mandarin, who has a cunning and sarcastic face, regular features, smooth chin, thick lips, white teeth, and dark, sly-looking eyes.

The followers form a picturesque group: "Their head-dresses are many and various, ranging from the Chinese hat to the Crusader's hooded cloak, the half turban of the date of Charles the Seventh, and monk's hood: we can recognise them all. The cut and colour of their clothes, too, vary, and they wear red, green, yellow, and black. Our tent reminds us of a stage on which the actors are preparing to play 'La Tour de Neale,' with the characters clad in the garments of the Middle Ages. These Lamas, in their variegated and picturesque costumes, do not look ill-disposed, and, as is becoming to 'supers,' do not breathe a single word, but squat on their heels, with an air of indifference to what is going on. The leading character is evidently the Amban."

A visit is paid to the tent of this dignitary, and the first thing that strikes attention on entering the tent is the quantity of sacred objects in every corner. Round the centre-pole twines a sort of ivy-work of niches for relics. An altar

is constructed by means of some chests, on the top of which is an image of Buddha in a gilded case. In front of it is a line of seven copper cups containing saffron and oil. A light is glimmering, perfumes are burning in boxes, and odoriferous sticks are smouldering in tea-pots. On the altar steps are some quaint figures cut in butter.

Tea is served at a small table in cups with silver lids. They are of beautiful Chinese ware; but the Amban's own cup is of green jade. Always in Thibet a lump of butter is stirred into the tea, which is what is known as "brick-tea." The Thibetans are said to be the largest consumers of tea in the world, and, in fact, to be unable to live without the decoction; but it is poor stuff the Chinese send to them, and there should be a chance for our British India tea planters securing the market some day.

The Talai Lama finally sends out presents, horses, and a guide to convoy the travellers to Batang, and the chiefs and officials are parted with on friendly terms. The journey thereafter is made under more comfortable conditions, all the chiefs and Lamas on the route being ordered to afford them hospitality and assistance.

Concerning the Thibetan women we learn that the poorer ones adorn themselves with copper bracelets and earrings—the richer ones with silver. Many of them wear glass necklaces brought from China, and sometimes strings of agates and other stones. These trinkets are often inserted in the hair, which is allowed to fall in fan-like form down the back. The women, for the most part, have small dark eyes, black hair, broad faces, and prominent cheek-bones. They are short, stout, strong, and muscular.

It is a land of polyandry as well as of polygamy, and this is how M. Bonvalot explains the working of the first-named custom:

"A couple have a marriageable daughter; a man is anxious to enter into this family, live under the same roof, and become the husband of the girl. He therefore visits her parents, states the terms he is prepared to offer, and when this dowry, or rather this charge for admission, is settled, becomes her husband and a member of the family. Other young men desirous of sharing his happiness present themselves, knock at the door, and if terms can be arranged, take their place, too, around the family hearth, thus becoming members of

the household and co-husbands. Sometimes, but very rarely, it happens that one of the husbands, through love or jealousy, or from some other motive, wishes to become the sole proprietor, the sole lord of the wife. In this case terms are arranged by which he becomes her sole master, and his colleagues obligingly retire when he has repaid them the sum they brought on entering the association, plus an indemnity, the amount of which is only settled after a long wrangle. If there are any children, they remain with the wife."

This system does not prevail by law or religious sanction, but has simply become custom. Neither polygamy nor polyandry is obligatory, but neither is forbidden, and each is determined by economic considerations.

But we must now leave this mysterious country and strange people with much regret at not being afforded a sight of the Holy City of Lhasa. M. Bonvalot and the Prince reached Batang, and then by way of the head-waters of the Salween, Mekong, and Yangtse, reached the French station of Ta-Chien-la, from which they pressed on to the coast. They embarked on the Red River on the twenty-second of September, 1890, just about one year after leaving Djarkend, having travelled from the Siberian frontier, three thousand seven hundred and fifty miles, on foot and horse-back. From Tonquin they returned by sea, taking steamer at Haiphong for Marseilles, very well satisfied with the results of their journey, even if they had not done all that they had hoped to do. But what plan of travel is ever carried out in its literal entirety?

A DAY AT THE LONDON FREE LIBRARIES.

"WELL, ta-ta, I am going to the club," said he. "And I to the free library," said she. And they parted. But the words, overheard in the street, and from people who were quite up to date in the way of looks and equipment, suggested the coming to the front of the free library as a useful and pleasant social institution. A very just and general objection is indeed made to the title Free Library, and it is suggested that "Public Library" is the proper description of what is in fact the common property of the public, and paid for out of the public funds. But anyhow the library, public and free, is becoming

one of the features of the period, and is made use of by all classes of the community.

The growth of the free library was not very rapid from the date of the Act of Parliament authorising its establishment, A.D. 1850, till within the last five years, when the number previously existing has been nearly doubled. In London especially the spread of public libraries has been rapid, and is going on at a rate that promises to leave no very extensive district unsupplied. The London ratepayer has been hard to convince of the benefit conferred by the free library, and, burdened as he is with ever-increasing demands, has felt a very natural reluctance to increase his charges. But experience has shown him that in the public library he gets a really handsome return for the individually small sum that he pays. There are still, however, extensive parishes which decline to have anything to do with free libraries. Deptford, with the memory of Sayes Court and the Evelyns to give it a turn for literature, will do nothing to aid its diffusion. Islington, Paddington, Marylebone form a solid phalanx of obstruction, the inhabitants of which must remain in mental darkness for all the public revenue is concerned.

Hearing first of one and then another of these public libraries opened here and there, the desire arises to see how they are moving along, and what use is made of them. There is our own suburban free library, which is only in a chrysalis state as yet, occupying three or four rooms in an ordinary house, and affording an adequate supply of newspapers and periodicals, but with only a limited store of books. Yet it is still already a great public convenience. From the moment the doors open there is a constant stream of people passing through the rooms. First of all, there are the youths and men of all ages, who are looking for means of earning a living, and who are searching the advertisement columns of situations vacant. Rather later we have a sprinkling of young women, who also want places, but who seem brighter and less dejected than the men. There are curates, too, who meet and converse, and write letters and postcards after consulting the clerical journals. Then we have ladies who have come to consult the oracles of fashion, and who muse and meditate over drawings of skirts and trains, and who wonder if the new style of hair will become them. Then there are the usual gentle old trots, who make out an hour or two over

the newspaper or in quiet reverie over the fire. So the day goes on, till evening brings a fuller gathering of those who have been at work all day, who wade patiently through the monthly magazines and illustrated papers.

But twenty minutes on a tramcar brings us to a more important institution. Here is a pleasant, old-fashioned mansion in the midst of a well-wooded park, and among pleasant gardens, which is the home of the Free Library of Hammersmith. A handsome room, pleasantly overlooking lawns and flower-beds, is devoted to newspapers, and is well filled with readers at whatever hour it may be visited. But the adjoining lending library is the sight of the morning. There the space in front of the desks and counters of the librarians is filled with a cheerful, well-dressed crowd, the most part of whom are ladies—young ones predominating. Here are married ones giving an anxious glance every now and then to the outside, to make sure that Mabel is not playing tricks with baby and the perambulator. Here is Clara with the golden curls and her favourite novel under her arm, who is anxious, too, about the little terrier she left tied up to the railings outside. Mary, too, is among the crowd with the volumes of her five elder sisters as well as her own to change, and who has got a little mixed with it all. Yet, by means of the indicators, which madden only the candidate for books, and leave the librarian calm and unruffled—and the really good system, common now to public libraries in general—the work is got through with very little friction, and the throng about the counters, constantly renewed, is also constantly streaming away, volume under arm.

But not to linger in Hammersmith and its pleasant park of Ravenscourt, we shall push on to Kensington, where the Free Library is well lodged in the former Vestry Hall, in the midst of the bustling High Street, with its fine shops and crowds of women—ladies of every degree, who are engaged, one and all, in the exciting pursuit of shopping. Within there is a large hall with lofty roof, three parts filled with desks and tables, which are well supplied with newspapers of all kinds, including sundry foreign and colonial sheets. The hall is well filled from morning to night, and all classes of the community are represented among the continually changing throng of readers. The end of the hall is occupied by the shelves and counters of the lending

library, which does a brisk business all day long. Here the long rows of indicators, which, like our old friend the chameleon, are constantly changing colour, in spots, from red to blue, and from blue to red, and are in themselves an indication of a large and well-stocked library of over twelve thousand volumes.

The indicators just referred to are now generally adopted by public lending libraries, and are themselves a product of the free library system. The Cotgreave Indicator, called after its inventor, the librarian of a public library, assumes the form of a screen, which separates the public from the working part of the library. A close examination shows that the screen is composed of a host of little pigeon-holes, or cells. There are a hundred of these cells in a row from the top to the bottom of the screen, and as each screen contains forty or fifty rows, it will be seen that the number of cells in each amount to four or five thousand. Within each cell is a little box, open at the top like the inside part of a Swedish match-box, only many sizes smaller, but just large enough to contain the borrower's ticket. At each end of the box is its number, on a red ground at one end, and on a blue ground at the other. Thus, number one appears at the top of the first row, while the second row shows number one hundred and one, and so on from century to century till you reach the end. Each number, of course, corresponds with the number of a book, and in psychical language the little box is the double of what may be a big book, and shares in all its future career. Thus, when book number fifty-five B is at home—the letter refers to its class, biography, fiction, and so on—the box fifty-five B will be found empty, and showing its blue end to the British public; but when a borrower arrives and demands number fifty-five B, the librarian at once takes down the little box, places the reader's ticket within, and replaces the box in its cell, but end for end, now showing the red end to the public gaze. The next man who wants number fifty-five B sees the red signal against him, and forbears to trouble the librarian in vain.

Kensington also shows us a very comfortable magazine room, where nearly all the monthlies find a place, and a very snug, comfortable reference library, which is more used, however, as a supplemental magazine room than for purposes of hard study. There are many ladies scattered

in the different rooms, and the general attendance is apparently of a superior cast. Artists, retired officers, professional men generally, are as ready to take advantage of the library reading-rooms, during the day, as are those engaged in business who throng to the place in the evening.

From Kensington we might visit Fulham, where we should find an excellent Public Library established in one of the old mansions on the road to Putney Bridge. Putney itself is not behindhand with its Free Library, and Wandsworth is also up to the mark. But without leaving Kensington parish there is an excellent branch at Notting Hill. On the way to Charing Cross we shall find Westminster well to the front with a new Public Library in Great Smith Street, while St. George's, Hanover Square, is preparing a handsome building for the purpose in the Buckingham Palace Road. But it may be as well to sample a district of an entirely different character. Bermondsey strikes one as being in most respects the opposite of Kensington—it is a district which does not attract genteel residents; its married ladies do not employ their afternoons in shopping, visiting, and gossiping; its young ladies are rarely artistic, literary, or critical, and being employed in jam factories, soap works, or other industries, have no great leisure for social amenities.

Well, now we are at St. George's Church, Southwark, as the sulky glow of a wintry afternoon is fading into darkness. There is no mistake about the way to Bermondsey; "it's down Long Lane as straight as you can go," so says a policeman, and there is Long Lane indicated by an old-fashioned label on the church wall. It was the way to Bermondsey Abbey in the old time, and it received its name not without good reason. For it is a long lane, and goes on and on, the houses getting smaller and the place altogether dingier the further you go. Ladies bare-headed and bare-armed stand at the street corners, children play about in troops, now and then the opening of the door of a public-house lets forth a sound of revelry, but otherwise the lane is quiet enough, and fragrant with the smell of fried fish, with a slight dash of naphtha fumes from the flaring lamps of the green-grocers, who are just lighting up their stalls.

But the Long Lane comes to an end at last in a space comparatively open which

reveals itself at a glance as the site of the Abbey, with its orchards and gardens, which has left behind a sort of ghostly impression of its former state projected upon the gas illumined haze of night. There might have been a free library at the Abbey ages ago, but it is not that way now. A traverse must be made round Star Corner and up the Grange Road—the way to the Abbey Grange, again, and so down the Spa Road, which suggests the eighteenth century and junketings at Bermondsey Wells, and there are little country cottages on one side which must have been acquainted with green fields in their youth; but on the other side are great leather works, with tanks and huge store-houses, and a slight flavour in the air—a mere suspicion—of tan and hides. Then there rises before us a building high and handsome, in light brickwork, its broad windows all lighted up, and diffusing a cheering glow all round. It is the new public library, a building designed and built for a public library, and a very good model of what such a building should be. There is a handsome entrance hall with tessellated floor, a fine news room, abundantly supplied with journals. On the same floor is the lending library, with abundant space for all requirements. On the floor above is a group of handsome rooms, well warmed and lighted, a magazine room, a reference library, not much used, and a "ladies' room." A ladies' room, says an authority on free libraries, means simply gossip. In this case, however, there is no gossip, for the sufficient reason that the room is empty. But even a little gossip is not a bad thing, and would be a relief from the somewhat oppressive silence that pervades the free library in general. Everywhere you see posted up, "Silence!" "Silence is requested," and so faithfully is the injunction carried out by the public, that after a round of free libraries one has an impression of belonging to a race that has lost its powers of speech. The silence really becomes oppressive, and one longs to hear a laugh or a whistle, or even a catcall, to break the solemn stillness of the scene.

Apart from this, which has nothing to do with Bermondsey in particular, what a noble foundation is this among the tanners and leather-dressers of Bermondsey, bringing cheerfulness and light into a neighbourhood somewhat gloomy and congested! Yet the people of Bermondsey do not crowd in as you might expect. A sprinkling of people are here—thirty or forty, perhaps, in

the whole building. No doubt as the institution becomes better known, and as the young people grow up who have acquired a taste for reading, the use of this fine building will extend. But at the present time the working classes of the population are not much attracted by the library. The silence and good order are a little too much for them; they miss the freedom, the chaff, the jokes of out-of-doors and the full-flavoured hilarity of the public-house. But while we are in South London there are many public libraries which will well repay a visit. Camberwell has a noble public library—the Livesey—owing much to the munificence of a wealthy founder; Clapham has recently built a fine library at a cost of four thousand pounds; Battersea has handsome new buildings devoted to public library and reading rooms; and Lambeth has taken the lead in establishing branch libraries in almost every quarter of its enormous circuit.

It is not far from Bermondsey to the Strand—from the dull, half-lighted gloom of factories and tan-pits to the roaring life and brilliant lights of the great thoroughfare. And there, by Charing Cross, where St. Martin's Lane opens out before the great peristyle of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, just in the lane and close by St. Martin's new Town Hall, stands the St. Martin's Free Library—a fine building, all aglow with the electric light, and giving a cheerful welcome to passers-by. The name of St. Martin's parish does not convey any distinct topographical notion to most people. We all know the church and the lane; but the boundaries of the parish do not seem to be marked decisively on the map of London. Anyhow, St. Martin's is to the front in the way of public libraries, for a nicer building or better arranged for its purposes, or one more busy and frequented, it would be difficult to find in all London.

It is close upon half-past six as we arrive at the portals of St. Martin's Free Library, and the moment is one of excitement. A queue has been formed, on either side of the doorway, of little boys, ranging in age from five to twelve. They are sharp, wide-awake little chaps, and are all tidily dressed, and some are smart enough in appearance; but they are all on an equal footing, and the desire among them to be first is accompanied by a perfectly good understanding, while eager glances at the clock face show that time has something to do with the matter. A

door within the building opens and the boys instantly spring forward; but they are warned back by a gesture. The clock still shows thirty seconds short of the half hour. A good-humoured gentleman, with a face of assumed sternness, is mounting guard over the door, his umbrella held across it. Till that umbrella moves, not a boy stirs.

Down goes the umbrella and away go the boys, racing for the door. "Tickets!" shouts the stern-faced man, and dozens of little hands are shown with little red tickets, season-tickets, if you please, held aloft. But the umbrella inexorably descends and shuts out a little group. "Haven't got tickets? What do you mean by coming without tickets? Well, you can go in," and away scamper the ticketless joyfully. But here, at the tail of the rush, comes a pair, one big and one little, and the big boy has lost ground by helping the little chap along. They haven't got tickets, either. "Show me your hands," says the stern janitor. "Go and wash, and then come back," to the big boy. The small mite shows his hands proudly; they really are clean, so is his face. "Um! How old are you?" "Please, sir, just five." "You must bring a note from your mother." Poor little five-years-old trots sadly back. Perhaps the good lady, his mother, does not know that he is out, and her sign manual may be impressed in an unpleasant manner on the youthful adventurer.

All this rush of boys is for that excellent affair the "boys' room" at St. Martin's, which opens at half-past six and closes at ten. It is a new experiment, commenced early in December, and the intention is to have little entertainments for the boys every Monday, with magic lanterns, and marvels of that kind, and sometimes a short lecture, Lady Frederick Cavendish kindly inaugurating the series. But the scamper at the opening is caused by the fact that there is a special little library of boys' books, kept in the boys' room, and as it is first come, first served, all the treasures of the boys' world are open to the hardy adventurer who secures the first place.

The stern janitor with the umbrella kindly allows one a peep into the boys' room, although beyond the legal age. A jolly, bright room it is, with rows of tables and cane-bottomed chairs, and a plentiful supply of juvenile literature, the electric glow-lamps brightening every cor-

ner of the lofty, airy room. It is a pleasant contrast to the gloom and damp outside, and the boys seem to be satisfied that they are going to have a real good time of it.

The same cheerful feeling pervades the rest of the building, although it finds no outward expression. There is the news-room on the ground floor, well lighted with electric glow lamps. The room is well filled, and most of the seats are occupied. The morning papers have lost their zest, perhaps, but the evening sheets have a numerous clientèle. "Special football edition!" the newsboys are hollaoing outside. The weekly journals, too, are a resource. Here is the Paris "Figaro," if one's interest lies that way. Here is an old gentleman who is deeply studying "The Peerage," and another more youthful who is busy with the "London Directory." All kinds of directories and manuals of that kind can be had on application at the counter, with time bills and every information that one can want. On the floor above, the magazine-room also holds a goodly number of people, and the lending library is doing a brisk business. The indicators give a good general idea, at a glance, of the circulation of the books, and the taste of the public in literature. Fiction is of course in most demand. The indicator concerned with fiction shows whole rows, all one red; that is without a volume at home. But the other screens are fairly sprinkled with red labels, and as people who want popular fiction have great difficulties in getting it owing to the great demand, they are often driven, whether they like it or no, into the lighter regions of literature.

The reference library at St. Martin's appears to be an unusually good one, and is placed in a fine, handsome room, well lighted, where reading is a pleasure. In a general way in London, the reference department of the Free Library is on a small scale, and but little used. But the want of use is purely owing to some lack of elasticity in the regulations of the department, which are too irksome for students. But the need of local reference libraries in London is lessened by the existence of the best reference library in the world at the British Museum, and by the Free Libraries at the Guildhall.

Perhaps it was owing to these special advantages that London held back a good deal at first in the race for providing Free Libraries. Manchester was almost the first place to take advantage of the Free Libraries Act, and its public

libraries are now numerous and excellent. Birmingham has a noble Public Library and many succursals. Liverpool boasts its William Brown Library and Museum rich in all kinds of literary and artistic treasures. Darlington has its Edward Pease Library well established and endowed. At Leeds there is also a fine Public Library in the Town Hall Buildings. Preston is proud of its noble Harris Library with its splendid endowment. Newcastle, Derby, Nottingham, Ipswich have each good Public Libraries, and as time goes on it will soon be a reproach to a town that calls itself a town to be without one. And in time too, let us hope, the villagers may have their turn.

THE THIRTEENTH BRYDAIN.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "Mr. Wingrove's Ways," "The Vicar's Aunt," "Dick's Wife," etc.

CHAPTER VIII.

BRYDAIN came down to dinner, two hours later, with the same haggard look on his face. He was very silent all the evening, and he told Dr. Kingston of his interview with Mr. Lennard in a few very concise words. His manner was very different from the joyous and almost boyish excitement with which he had told his news to Mrs. Kingston and the two girls. There was a certain curious defiance in it, and a determined self-control.

This change in his manner, however, seemed to wear off again in the course of the next few days. As Brydain grew interested and keenly engrossed in searching for rooms in which to settle down to work, his first cheerful elation came back, in some degree, and he pursued his investigations with unceasing energy.

These were rather complicated by conflicting advice. Dr. Kingston recommended him to try the newer parts of Kensington. Mr. Lennard himself lived in the North-West district; and it was, of course, important that Brydain should not be too far from him; and he was further confused by a warmly expressed hope that he would settle himself somewhere within easy reach of the Temple. This last came from Edward Tredennis, the young barrister who had been at the Kingstons' dinner-party. Tredennis had, shortly after that evening, invited Brydain to dine with him at his club; and since then the two had

met several times, incidentally and otherwise. A curious affinity, or whatever it was that had arisen between the two very dissimilar men, promised to ripen into a warm friendship; and Tredennis was anxious that Brydain should be near himself.

It was obviously impossible for Brydain to find a street which should meet all his wishes; and it was only after much indecision and agitation, in the course of which, so Tiny asserted, he had eleven times come home to lunch and announced that he had at last found "the very thing," that he finally compromised matters by making nearness to Mr. Lennard the most important consideration, and therefore taking some rooms which contented him in Upper Baker Street. He established himself in them a week later, having in the interval chosen a piano with Mr. Lennard's help, and sent for several of his smaller possessions from Brydain.

They were very ordinary rooms—a sitting-room and a bedroom opening out of each other, each with a somewhat dull outlook. Brydain contented himself with the reflection that this fact was "all the better for work," and placed his father's little clock in the middle of the mantel-shelf, arranged above it two or three photographs and pictures which had hung on the walls of his own room at Brydain, with a feeling that this new life of his was still linked to the old life, and would soon grow natural and accustomed enough. Among the photographs was one which he had sent directions to Mackenzie to have taken for him—a photograph of the Great House, seen from Brydain village. It looked inexpressibly incongruous somehow amidst the modern surroundings, and not very tasteful ornamentation of the room; for the Great House stood out in the photograph almost as darkly and as weirdly as it did in reality. It caught Tredennis's eye on the first time he came to see Brydain in his new rooms. And he broke off abruptly in his leave-taking:

"Where's that?" he said, ungrammatically and hastily.

"That? Oh, that's Brydain," said its master.

"That's your home!" Tredennis exclaimed. "My good fellow, I'm not surprised you would rather live in town! It looks as if it were haunted. Have you a ghost, or anything of the sort?"

"No," answered Brydain, shortly—so very shortly that Tredennis wondered for

the first few moments of his walk home, what he could have said to irritate Brydain.

One of Brydain's first actions, after he had really settled down, was to invite Mrs. Kingston, Rachel, and Tiny to tea with him. His invitation was accepted instantly, and his "housewarming," as Tiny would persist in calling it, was a great success. Mrs. Kingston, having investigated them with a matronly eye, approved of all his domestic arrangements; and Tiny, after a survey of his sitting-room, came to the vigorously expressed conclusion that lodgings were "much more interesting than one's own house." The large, striking photograph of the Great House had caught her sharp eyes as quickly as it had caught Tredennis's; but she did not comment on it. She had not forgotten that evening in the drawing-room, and had carefully ever since refrained from asking Brydain questions of any sort whatever. The three left Brydain's rooms with an injunction to him not to work too hard, and to come to Weymouth Street as soon and as often as he could.

Brydain had arranged with Mr. Lennard for two lessons a week, or, rather, Mr. Lennard had told Brydain that he could give him two; that he must have two at the least; and that it should have been three if he himself could have made the time to give them.

He had been very good to Brydain about terms. When the latter had, half nervously, at the end of their decisive interview, said something about wishing to know them, Mr. Lennard had answered with the easy and eccentric good-nature which was a strong trait in his mixed individuality:

"My terms are my own, young man. I'll let you know them at the end of six months; and meantime the half of them is hard work."

Brydain took the half cynical words to heart.

"Work hard!" he had repeated to himself, on the way back from Mr. Lennard's house that day. "I should think so!"

He had, in himself, a hitherto almost untouched vein of perseverance; which now, with the opportunity for using it, sprang suddenly into a strength and prominence that he himself had never suspected.

He set to work with determination and energy; he practised hard for every moment of the time which Mr. Lennard would allow him to use his voice; and at his second lesson rather surprised his

master by asking to be allowed to extend this. Mr. Lennard was surprised, too, though this surprise he did not express to his pupil, at the progress which Brydain had made even in the elementary stage which was, of course, all he had as yet reached.

At the end of a fortnight, not content with his own work during the day, he began a course of theoretic study in the evenings, which often kept him up far into the night. This he pursued systematically; the only breaks he allowed himself being attendance at those concerts at which Mr. Lennard, or some one of whom he approved, was singing, that he might learn something of their methods by practical observation.

It was Mr. Lennard who had suggested this method of learning to his pupil; and unprepared as he was for the zeal with which all his suggestions were to be received, he was at first surprised, and then contentedly amused, when he found that he never came on to a platform in those weeks without seeing Brydain's eager, handsome face fixed intently upon him from the front.

It seemed to Brydain himself that with this new life of his he had entered a new and hitherto utterly unknown world—a world so very strange and so wholly different from anything he had ever known, that he at first had felt, in entering it, that he was losing in it his own identity. But a conviction came to him, gradually and vaguely, that the identity he was losing was only an incomplete one, and that which seemed to advance to meet him, as it were, out of the shadows of this new world, was his real and future self.

There was a strong artistic instinct in him, which had perhaps come to him from some long gone ancestor, or was perhaps created for the first time in him. And this same instinct was all the more real and forcible because so long dormant. It rose with the new outlet now suddenly provided for it, until it grew into an intense enthusiasm which promised almost to remodel, and certainly to dominate, Brydain's former characteristics.

And the very alphabet, as it were, of this artistic instinct was all unknown to him. Music itself, all its technical framework, that is to say, was entirely new to him; and thus simply to study or to hear new music was in itself an enthralling interest.

Tredennis often looked in upon him in the evenings, and now and then ended his evening work with friendly insistence; but

these last occasions were rare. Tredennis was a hard-working man himself, and had too great a respect for work in the abstract to interrupt it, unless he saw absolute necessity for such interruption. On Sundays Brydain sometimes went to Tredennis; once or twice took a long walk in the company of the latter; and went sometimes to Weymouth Street.

So the weeks of June slipped by, and the first two of July followed them; and Brydain was beginning to feel as if he had never done anything. All his life but practise singing exercises, when a sudden spell of unusually hot weather set in. It was the first time in his life that Brydain had been in London in the summer. His former visits had happened to take place in spring and in winter; and the most oppressive summer weather he had ever known at Brydain was weather which in London would have been considered comparatively cool, certainly quite bearable. There was always a strong, cool breeze blowing at Brydain; either over the hills, up the ravine, or across the wide moorland; and the Great House itself was cool, almost cold. Even on the longest of summer days, scarcely any warmth seemed to penetrate those thick walls, and scarcely any sunshine came through those narrow windows. To Brydain, therefore, the choking, suffocating heat of an oppressive day in London came like a sudden shock—a shock that tried his spirits and his energy not a little. It seemed to him on one especially hot Monday morning as if it were all at once impossible to work, as if he could do nothing but sit with his window and his door both open, and gasp for a little fresh air. However, he rallied all his force and worked as hard as usual for that day and the next, which was the day he took his lesson. He walked very slowly and wearily through the heat to Mr. Lennard's rooms; still, he took his lesson with exactly the same enthusiasm and interest as usual. But the critical ear of his master found unusual shortcomings in his work. He gave one or two keen glances at Brydain, and made no general comment until Brydain took his music in his hand to go, when he said, tersely:

"Don't overdo it, man; it's abominably hot."

Brydain flung his music on the table when he reached his rooms, and looked at the clock. It was just four, and he wondered rather vaguely what he should do. He did not feel equal to any more

work that afternoon, and it was too hot for anything like a walk, his usual resource by way of refreshment.

Suddenly some words of Tiny's, spoken to him the last time he had been to Weymouth Street, one Sunday afternoon, a fortnight since, flashed into his mind: "I believe you've quite forgotten there is such a day as Tuesday. Mind you come one day this month, or I'll never forgive you."

Mrs. Kingston was at home on the first and second Tuesday in every month. But throughout July she had altered this arrangement, or rather developed it. She was giving, as her last before they left town, a series of three "at homes," held on the first three Tuesdays in July. And to-day, Tuesday, the seventeenth, was the last of these.

In another three-quarters of an hour, Brydain was ascending the stairs in Weymouth Street; he was preceded by several other people, and it was some moments before the Kingstons' servant was ready to announce "Mr. Keith Brydain."

As soon as he had done so, however, and before Brydain had had time actually to follow his name in the drawing-room, Tiny came hastily across the room.

"I'll receive you!" she said, laughing.

Ever since the mistake she had made in asking Brydain about his family tradition, Tiny had been, if possible, more cordial and friendly to her cousin than before. There was something a trifle deprecating in her friendliness, too. It was as if she wanted to atone for her awkwardness.

"Mother is in that corner," she went on, "by old Lady Kenworthy, who is talking about cooks. You never can get away from Lady Kenworthy. I can't think why mother was so incautious as to let her begin."

She had spoken so fast that Brydain had not had time to answer her; and all the time she spoke she had moved towards a cool corner in the back drawing-room by her fernery. There was a little sofa there, and she sat down, and motioned Brydain to do so also.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said; "I thought you never would turn up any more. It's ages since the last Sunday you came to tea. I'm sure you want a holiday, too," she added, looking up in his face. "You look quite knocked up."

Brydain made a laughing protest, but Tiny did not heed it in the least.

"I'll reward you for coming," she said. "I'm very pleased with you. Go and get some tea or coffee, ices, or what you like, and bring it here. When you come back I'll introduce you to the prettiest girl you ever saw, and you can talk to her while I look after mother. Run on now, like a good boy," Tiny ended, in a little authoritative voice.

Brydain laughed, and rose somewhat slowly.

"Suppose I don't think it's any reward?" he said. "I don't care about young ladies."

"You're a very rude boy!" was all the response he received.

When he had got himself some coffee, he suddenly came across his cousin Rachel, who had been talking to two rather shy girls in a corner of the room. She greeted him warmly, and asked him many questions as to his work, and why he had been so long in coming to see them. Brydain stood talking to her for some minutes, during which he forgot Tiny and her promise; quite suddenly he remembered her, and, with a word to Rachel, went through the crowded room towards the back drawing-room. The light was dim and shaded in both rooms, for the sun-blinds were down over all the windows. But as he reached the sofa again, Brydain saw clearly enough, standing beside it, Tiny, who made him a reproving little face, and at her side a girl.

She was very little taller than Tiny, and in figure was even slighter. But Brydain scarcely saw her figure, though it was outlined distinctly enough in her soft yellow muslin gown against the dim shadow of the room; he saw only her face. It was a small, perfectly oval face, very dark indeed in colouring, with hair that was extremely dark also. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were as dark as possible. The last were long and curled, and she lifted them quickly, showing Brydain large, liquid grey eyes, as Tiny said:

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A LION IN THE WAY.

By C. L. PIRKIS.

CHAPTER I.

"No! Is it possible?" exclaimed Mr. Bennett, postmaster of the little village of Axtree, pausing, pen in hand, to stare blankly at the telegram which he had just been transcribing from the dictation of Miss Rosalie Jenkins, the telegraphist of the establishment.

Mr. Bennett's thoughts travelled slowly, and it was not until the message lay before him as a whole that its full import dawned upon him.

Complete, it ran as follows:

"Lion has escaped, and has started on road to A."

The telegram was signed simply "Price." It was addressed to "Sir George Crowther, The Hall, Axtree," and had been despatched from the general post office at Watherston, the market town of the district, and distant about seven miles from Axtree.

Miss Rosalie left her place at the wires, and bent her much-becurled head over the message.

"Oh, my!" was all she said; but her face grew very white, and there came a gurgling in her throat, which, to Mr. Bennett's fancy, threatened hysterics.

Mrs. Bennett, with a baby in her arms, peeping through the muslin blind of the door which separated the shop from the parlour, fancied that Miss Rosalie's sandy-brown curls and her husband's shiny black

head were closer together than was necessary, so she forthwith opened the parlour door and came upon the scene. Then four heads—the baby's included—bent over the fearful words, and exclamations became general.

"Escaped! From the travelling menagerie, of course," cried Mrs. Bennett, who prided herself upon her quick powers of apprehension and clear common-sense. "Trinkler's caravans, you know, went through the village yesterday afternoon. They set the tea-canisters jingling on the shelves as they passed, they were so mighty heavy. And Widow Henty, when she came in for her Demerara and best mottled this morning, told me there was to be a performance at Watherston to-night."

"And 'A,' of course, means Axtree," chimed in Miss Rosalie. "There's no other place far or near that begins with an A. Mercy on us! the monster is on his road to us!"

The postmaster rubbed his forehead thoughtfully.

"Who can Price be?" he muttered. "There's Price, an undertaker, as you enter the town, and there's the superintendent of police——"

"That's who it is, depend upon it!" cried Mrs. Bennett. "He wants to warn us all of the danger we're in, and so wires to Sir George, who is a magistrate, and will know what to do. Oh, good gracious! what's that?"

With an extra clutch to her baby, which caused the little creature to lift up its voice, she turned and faced the door, as if

she expected there and then to see the monster walk in with jaws gaping to devour her.

There entered, however, no one more formidable than Jacob, the shop assistant, returned from his delivery of the day's groceries with an empty basket on his arm.

He was a lanky youth of twenty, with a tallowy complexion and large vacant eyes. Exclamation after exclamation was hurled at him.

"Shut the door, Jacob! Bolt it! bar it!" screamed Mrs. Bennett. "There's a lion got loose from Trinkler's menagerie, and is making straight for Axtree! Do you want us all to be eaten up alive?"

"Oh, thank Heaven you've got back safely!" cried Miss Rosalie, with a repetition of the gurgling in her throat which had before alarmed her employer.

It was an open secret in the village that Miss Rosalie, on the wrong side of thirty, had fixed her affections on this innocent youth.

Jacob set down his basket, looking vaguely from one to the other, but contriving to keep Mrs. Bennett and the baby between him and Miss Rosalie.

"The village ought to be warned at once," continued Mrs. Bennett; "every one ought to be told to keep their dear children indoors."

"As regards that," said her husband, slowly, "I'm in a delicate position. I'm a Government servant, and have no right to make any private use of a telegram which passes through my hands."

"What!" cried Mrs. Bennett, in a high key; "are you going to let the village be eaten up alive, John?"

"The head office is very strict on the matter, and I wouldn't like them to take the post office away from me."

"Has the telegram been delivered at the Hall yet, sir?" asked Jacob, a little timidly.

"Delivered!" echoed Mrs. Bennett, shrilly; "how could any one expect such a telegram as that to be delivered? It's a mile and a half from here to the Hall if you take the shortest way, and then there's the pine wood to go through before you get to the house. And if you go by the road—Mercy on us, there's that door again! Jacob, why didn't you draw the bolt as I told you to?"

"It's the Vicar," said Jacob, drawing back a step to let the reverend gentleman pass in, and then, in response to Mrs. Bennett's pantomimic gestures, he carefully bolted and locked the door.

The Vicar was a tall and very benevolent-looking personage, with a mellow voice which was apt to sink to a deeply pathetic tone when he enlarged from the pulpit upon his favourite topic—the ills of life, and the duty of Christians to bear one another's burthens.

"I know you supply everything under the sun, Bennett," he began, pleasantly; "from a rushlight to a silk gown; now, do you happen to have such things as sand-bags——" He broke off, suddenly becoming conscious that his listeners were only according him a divided attention, and then added, in a tone of deep concern: "Eh, what is it, Mrs. Bennett? Baby hasn't been attacked by measles or whooping cough, I hope."

For once Mr. Bennett was prompter of speech than his wife.

"I'm in a difficulty, sir," he answered, eager for the Vicar's counsel. "A most important telegram for the Hall has just been received here, and I'm doubtful whether I have the right to act upon the information it contains."

The Vicar stepped into the pulpit at once.

"Never be doubtful on a matter of duty, Bennett," he answered, in loud, dogmatic tones. "The line that separates right from wrong is ever clear and distinct to the single eye. You would have no right whatever to do as you suggest."

"What, not even if the telegram told you that a raging, rampaging lion was coming along the road to devour us all?" cried Mrs. Bennett, who was not to be longer repressed.

The Vicar smiled benignly upon her, thinking that she was putting a supposititious case.

"What—the old story—a lion in the path of duty?" he said. "Even at the risk of encountering what you call 'a raging, rampaging lion,' I repeat, duty must be done unflinchingly. I trust, however, in this case no danger comparable to the metaphorical lion is to be feared."

But here three voices in chorus convinced him of the fact that no metaphorical lion was alluded to, but the beast itself in flesh, and blood, and tawny skin.

"A half-starved beast escaped from Trinkler's menagerie," cried Mrs. Bennett.

"And started for Axtree over an hour ago, and no doubt by this time has got into Sir George's woods," gurgled Miss Rosalie.

"And is lying in wait for the dear

children, to make its supper off them—the brute," finished Mrs. Bennett.

The benign smile faded from the Vicar's face.

"Ah-h, that alters the case unquestionably," he said. "Of course it would be downright sinful not to act upon such information as that."

"I should think, sir, in the circumstances, I might telegraph back to the superintendent at Wetherston to send over a strong body of police to look after us?" queried the postmaster.

"Well, I'm not sure but what a strong body of hunting men, armed with guns, would not be better. But Sir George is master of the hunt, and a magistrate into the bargain, and will know what to do. Get the telegram to the Hall at once, and leave it to him."

"Whoever takes that telegram to the Hall, it shan't be you," cried Mrs. Bennett, fiercely, catching her husband by the coat-sleeve.

"Oh, Jacob, for my sake, don't risk your life," whimpered Miss Rosalie, taking out her pocket-handkerchief.

Bennett looked bewildered, and for a moment his powers of speech failed him. Then suddenly a bright idea struck him. He released his coat-sleeve, and turned to the Vicar.

"Is that your horse and trap outside, sir?" he asked, glancing at the shop door, and thinking what a practical enforcement it would be of the good Vicar's teaching if he himself volunteered to be the messenger to the Hall.

His hopes were to be quickly enough extinguished, however.

"Yes, that's my horse and trap," answered the Vicar, "and that reminds me I mustn't keep Brown Bess waiting in the damp any longer, and there's a nasty dark bit of road between here and the Vicarage. I won't trouble about the sand-bags to-day," he went on, moving towards the door. Then, with his foot on the step of his dog-cart, he added: "Of course I'd offer to take the telegram for you with pleasure, only my duty calls me another way. To-morrow will be Sunday; my sermon as yet is only half written. Unless I get to work at once, my flock will be unfed. As I said before, duty should ever be paramount with us all. Good afternoon."

He started his horse at a good pace, then pulled up a moment to add another word.

"Get that telegram off as quickly as possible; it's your duty as postmaster, Bennett," he shouted back; "and you may be quite sure I shall warn every one I meet as I go along."

Bennett went back into his shop and bolted the door behind him.

"He call himself a clergyman and a Christian," cried Mrs. Bennett, aflame with indignation. "He talk about duty! He's an old bachelor himself, with nobody but an old housekeeper to shed a tear if anything happened to him, and he ought to have said, 'Bennett, as a married man, and the head of a family, it's your bounden duty to stay indoors when there's danger abroad.'" She paused for breath, throwing an angry, indignant look at Jacob.

Jacob summoned his courage, and answered the look.

"I hope to be a married man and head of a family some day," he said, not liking the turn affairs were taking.

Miss Rosalie clasped her hands and drew a step nearer to him. Jacob got the other side of the counter, and in his extremity thought it best to speak plainly.

"I was thinking of Lucy Mills, Miss Crowther's maid," he said; "she knitted my last comforter, and has promised to make my next set of aprons."

Miss Rosalie unclasped her hands and suddenly grew spiteful.

"If you start at once for the Hall, you'll stand a chance of seeing Lucy Mills; she's always off duty between five and six."

"I think it must be you, Jacob," said Mr. Bennett, speaking with a slow decision.

"I'd go in a minute, only duty to my wife and child forbids it."

"Of course it does," interrupted his wife. "Take a big stick, Jacob, and set off at once, before it gets any darker."

"And take a lantern for coming back—that is, if ever you do come back," said Miss Rosalie, with a slight return of the gurgling in her throat.

Mr. Bennett added his last word as he handed the telegram to the reluctant Jacob.

"And if anything should happen to you, Jacob—though of course I sincerely hope it will not—you may be quite sure I'll look after your mother—h'm, that is to say, I'll send her a month's pay, just as I should if I had dismissed you at a moment's notice."

CHAPTER II.

AT the Hall lamps were lighted and curtains were drawn.

Sir George Crowther sat cross-legged in a capacious easy-chair, beside his study fire, indulging in a comfortable doze after a hard day's hunting.

This "comfortable doze" had grown to be an institution on hunting days, and due respect was paid to it by every member of the household. Only on one memorable occasion had it ever been violated, and that was when some distinguished visitors had unexpectedly arrived at the Hall. The butler, who was responsible for the broken nap, was heard to remark afterwards that "No, not for Queen Victoria herself would he ever go through such another quarter of an hour."

Even Gertie, Sir George's only and very much petted daughter, had learnt to walk on tiptoes past the study door, and to keep her piano closed during the solemn hour.

"It's like a little bit of Sunday at the wrong time," she said to herself on this particular afternoon, as she looked ruefully at a pile of new songs, and then, for lack of something better to do, began practising a new waltz step in front of a mirror.

Gertie was a pretty, coquettish brunette on the verge of twenty, small and slight in figure, and dainty in her dress. She was motherless, sisterless, and governessless; yet, for all her lack of feminine companionship, a more fascinating little damsel was not to be found in the three kingdoms. Sir George was vastly proud of her, and was wont to call her brother Dick sharply to account when he accused her, as his habit was, of a want of "pluck" and "go," and of having "no more backbone than a frog or nerves than a mouse."

Gertie's thoughts, in light, girlish fashion, kept merry time with her light steps and the soft waltz tune she was humming.

"One, two, three; one, two, three," those thoughts ran. "What a long game of billiards Colonel Eden and Dick are having! What a splendid man Colonel Eden is! Every inch a soldier—has such a delightful manner with ladies—so deferential—one, two, three—has had such wonderful adventures out in India, I could sit and listen to them for ever. It was very stupid of Vivian to be so cross the other night, and say such ridiculous things, just because I sat and

talked with the Colonel in the window recess for ten minutes or so. I don't think Vivian is half so good-tempered as he used to be, and when he comes to-night I shall just give him a lesson in good manners, and make him understand that if I have promised to marry him some day it doesn't mean that I'm never to have any fun with any one else. Dear me! I wonder why Dick doesn't bring the Colonel in for some tea?"

Here Gertie's thoughts were brought to a sudden halt by the opening of the door and the entrance of the butler. Ostensibly he came in to see if the young lady's fire or tea-table required attention; but there was a subdued excitement in his manner which made itself felt, and which caused Gertie to enquire:

"What is it, Johnson? Has anything happened?"

"I should think it had, Miss Gertie!" he answered, promptly. "A lion and lioness have made their escape from Trinkler's menagerie, and were seen on the road to Axtree."

"Oh-h! is it possible?" cried Gertie, turning very pale.

"It's quite true, Miss Gertie. Tom, one of the gardener's boys, met the Vicar driving at a furious rate through the village, and he shouted the news to him as he passed, and told him to get back home as fast as his legs could carry him."

"Some one had better go and tell father at once," Gertie said, getting whiter still, and her voice beginning to quake a little.

"It won't be me, Miss Gertie," said Johnson, speaking with the respectful familiarity of a servant of twenty-five years' standing, "and, if you'll take my advice, it won't be you either."

Although the thought of Sir George's possible blustering wrath was at any moment a sufficient reason for blanched cheeks on the part of this timorous young person, there was a deeper cause for terror in her mind now. Vivian Wyngate, her affianced lover, had his home in a hamlet called White Hill, lying about three miles north of Watherston, and distant some six or seven miles from Axtree. He was expected to dine and sleep at the Hall that night, and of necessity would run the gauntlet of the dark roads and darker woods which lay between his home and the Hall, unless means could be found to prevent his setting off.

"A telegram must be sent to him at once," said Gertie, and there was no need

to tell Johnson to whom "him" on Gertie's lips referred.

"Ye-es, Miss Gertie," he answered, a little dubiously; "I'll go at once and see which of the men can go with one."

With his hand on the door-handle he paused to add: "I'd be delighted to go myself, Miss Gertie, but my duties always keep me in the house at this hour. Sir George would be furious if I neglected the cellarette, and did not keep my eye on Thomas when he lays the dinner—he's so careless and forgetful."

Then he departed as if in great haste to despatch a messenger. Gertie waited impatiently for five minutes, but he did not reappear. It was now nearly half-past five; dinner had been ordered for eight o'clock that night, so as to give Vivian time for his long, dark ride. He would not, she knew, be likely to set off much before seven, and there would be plenty of time to get a telegram to him if only a messenger could be found to take it down to the village. But what was to be done if the footmen, and grooms, and gardeners, one and all, were to discover that their duties, like Johnson's, prevented their complying with her request?

"I had better go and tell Dick and Colonel Eden, and see what they advise," she decided. "After all, there's something cowardly in setting one's servants to do what one wouldn't dare do oneself."

Dick and the Colonel had finished their game of billiards, and, cigars in hand, were lounging with their backs to the fire, and their elbows on the mantelpiece.

In appearance Dick was small, and dark, and cynical-looking; the Colonel stalwart and trim, but decidedly elderly.

They were both a little surprised at Gertie's sudden appearance. She did not, however, give them time to speak their astonishment, but all in a breath told them the startling news, her anxiety to send a telegram to Vivian, and the evident unwillingness of the servants to take it to the post office.

Dick gave a low whistle.

"I hope, my dear little sister," he said, patronisingly, "you don't expect me to be your messenger. There are some things I would do for you, and some I would not, and this is one of the things I would not do."

"Oh, but, Dick, if you rode and took a gun—you are such a dead shot, you know," she pleaded. And then her eyes wandered appealingly to the Colonel's face.

All sorts of wonderful stories of his adventures and tiger hunts in India came with a rush into her mind, together with a certain remark of his, made with sundry other chivalrous speeches during their quiet chat in the window recess, to the effect that he would "call that man a cad who wouldn't be ready at a moment's notice to risk his life to fulfil a lady's behest."

He felt the mute appeal, put out his cigar, and slightly smiled.

"My dear Miss Crowther, it's a village story, depend upon it, nothing more. Such a thing is so exceedingly unlikely to——"

"But it's true—every word. The Vicar has been driving about the village all the afternoon warning everybody," interrupted Gertie, almost unconsciously exaggerating the facts that had come to her knowledge.

"Well, then," interposed Dick, "all I can say is, Vivian must take his chance and look after himself, I'm not going to bother about him." Then he turned to the Colonel. "Have your revenge, Eden?" he asked, taking up one of the cues.

The Colonel took possession of another.

"My dear Miss Crowther," he said, as he settled himself to a game, "pray don't frighten yourself with imaginary dangers. If those lions did escape, depend upon it they were recaptured immediately. Now, if there were any real danger, I'm the man to face it, but——"

Gertie did not wait to hear the end of his sentence. There came a hot rush of indignant tears to her eyes, and hastily averting her face, she left the room.

"There is no help for it, father must be awakened at once; he'll tell us what to do," she said to herself, as she turned her steps towards the study. Very softly, as if her object were not to awaken, she turned the handle of the door and peeped in.

Lamps were unlighted here, only the flickering firelight revealed Sir George's portly form in the depths of his easy-chair.

Gertie made one step into the room, then stumbled over something. What was it—a slipper? And why was it there? A hasty glance at her father's feet discovered one of them to be slipperless, and suggested as an uncomfortable answer to the question that some one had looked into the room just as he was settling to his nap, and had had a slipper at his head for his pains.

At this moment Sir George slightly moved in his sleep. It was too much for

Gertie's mouse-like nerves. She turned and fled precipitately.

The startling news of the escaped lions had spread like wildfire through the house. Lucy Mills, Gertie's pretty little maid, went in search of her young mistress, eager to impart to her some additional and thrilling details which had grown out of the original facts.

Lucy's power of speech, however, failed her, and she scarcely dared trust the evidence of her eyesight, when, as she entered Gertie's dressing-room, she found the young lady on the point of leaving it equipped in coat and hat.

Gertie's face was very white, but her voice was firm and steady enough as she answered Lucy's look of astonishment.

"Yes," she said, "I know all about the lion and lioness, and I'm going myself into the village to send a telegram to Mr. Wyngate, to prevent his coming to-night."

"Miss Gertie! It's a mile and a half from here to the post office. And there's that horrible dark pine wood."

"And it's nearly seven miles from White Hill here, and there are no end of dark woods on either side of the road," said Gertie. "And I mean to go—and you are not to say a word to any one. Do you hear, Lucy? I shall creep out through one of the drawing-room windows, and be back again—that is, if nothing happens to me—long before father wakes."

"Oh, Miss Gertie, send one of the men!"

"I wouldn't trust one of them now," said Gertie, throwing back her head indignantly. "They all knew I wanted a telegram taken, and no one volunteered to go with it. I believe if I insisted they would just start, and then run away and hide somewhere!"

Lucy clasped her hands together imploringly. "Oh, pray don't go, Miss Gertie—pray, pray don't. I'd offer to go for you in a minute, only—only—" Here a flood of tears choked her words. "Oh, Miss Gertie," she resumed between her sobs, "if the house were on fire, I'd rush in and save you; or if you fell into the water, I'd jump in after you; but—but this would be such a horrible death to be torn to pieces alive—"

But here sobs choked her voice, and she sank helplessly on the floor, almost at Gertie's feet.

Gertie's lip slightly curled. But all she said was:

"I desire that you tell no one that I have gone out."

Then she left Lucy alone with her sobs and tears, and with swift but silent feet made her way down a back staircase, thence into the drawing-room, where she softly unbarred a shutter, and then passed out through one of the French windows.

It was not until she had closed the window behind her that it occurred to her that she had forgotten to provide herself with a lantern.

Overhead rain-clouds were gathering from all quarters, and the sky was blackness itself. There was no moon; here and there a star showed between the rifts of the clouds, but these even as she looked at them disappeared.

There were two ways of reaching the village from the Hall. One was through the park and out by the lodge into the high road; the other was through the shrubberies and pine wood into the road. This was the shorter way of the two by about half a mile, so Gertie decided in favour of it. Time was getting on now, and she was anxious to get her telegram into Vivian's hands.

She looked from the dark sky to the darker shrubberies, above which, in the near distance, towered the funereal pines, and her courage almost failed her. She felt that she must take herself vigorously in hand or else succumb altogether.

"I don't mind the least bit in the world not having a lantern," she said, quite out loud. "I know every step of the way. And it doesn't follow because a lion and lioness have got out of their cages that therefore they must be in our woods. They may be dozens of miles away by this time. I don't see why I should think any more about them. No! I'll just talk quite aloud about nice pleasant things all the way through the shrubberies, and when I get into the wood I'll sing at the very top of my voice all the songs that Vivian and I have ever sung together, and all the waltz tunes we've danced to, and—oh, dear, it does look gloomy!"

She had now passed through the flower-garden, and had reached the first of the narrow paths which wound in and out between high hedges of arbutus and laurel of the shrubberies.

Gertie quickened her steps almost into a run now, and talked away faster than ever.

"Fancy Colonel Eden turning out a failure! Dick was always selfish and cold-hearted, but I did think the Colonel

was made of different stuff. He risk his life to fulfil a lady's behest! Why, he'd think twice before he made his boots muddy to serve her. And to think that I should give Vivian real pain for such a man as that! Vivian is worth a hundred such. The very first time I see him I'll tell him— Heigh ho! I wonder if Vivian and I ever will meet again?"

All out of breath with her rapid walking and talking, she had now reached the little rustic gate which led from the shrubberies into the wood. Her deep sigh had evidently been called forth by the, literally, gloomy prospect which lay before her.

This was no ornamental wood, with paths neatly swept by gardeners every morning, but a real tangle of undergrowth beneath closely planted firs and pines; a tangle of furze, and bracken, and bramble, in which a late spring had repressed all signs of greenery, and which lay blackened and scorched just as winter frosts had left it. Through this undergrowth had been cut two narrow paths, which went zig-zagging about twenty yards apart through the wood, until they met at its further end.

A light wind had risen now, and went sighing drearily amid the pine-tops. Gertie paused for a moment, with her hand on the rustic gate.

"A churchyard and real ghosts would be nothing to it," she murmured; "but— but it's for Vivian. And, perhaps, when I'm well in it, and if I sing very, very loud, it won't be so bad. No, I'm not really frightened, but—I do wish I had brought a lantern."

In spite of her hopes, however, when she was "well in it," as she had phrased it, matters did not seem to mend. Now to the right, anon to the left went her head with every step she took.

"I wonder," she thought, as she peered into the brushwood, "if they walk about in couples in search of food, and if I shall see two pairs of fiery eyes suddenly look out at me from the bushes?"

Then, in order to keep all such terrible thoughts out of her mind, she essayed to tune her voice to song. Gertie's voice was a clear soprano; but the notes she contrived to bring forth now sounded strangely hoarse and unlike her own. Then, too, that mournful sighing among the pines overhead seemed to put to flight all bright, tuneful melodies, and, oddly enough, out of the innumerable songs she knew, only one would occur to her now.

That was a jingling banjo song of Dick's, which at an ordinary moment would never have entered her head.

"I feel, I feel, I feel," she carolled forth with her voice at a high nervous pitch, "I feel like a morning star."

When she had made this curious announcement to the pine-tops she suddenly paused, for distinctly, beneath, as it were, her own high-pitched tones there came to her a sound—what was it?—of trampling among the bramble and bracken?

All her courage failed her now. With every beat of her heart the sound of trampling came nearer. White, forlorn, helpless, she leaned against a rough-coated pine for support, looking wildly around for the fiery eyes which she expected would glare out from among the black bushes, and straining her ears for the sound of the low, savage growl which would form a fit corollary to the fiery eyes.

Instead, however, there came to her the sound of a loud, cheery human voice, saying:

"In the name of all that's wonderful, Gertie, what are you doing here at this time of night?"

And at the same moment the black bushes were parted right and left, and Vivian Wyngate's fair, handsome face looked out at her.

It was a minute or two before Gertie could get voice enough to answer him, and when her explanation came it was all but incoherent.

Vivian, however, seemed to grasp the meaning of her broken sentences easily enough.

"You did all this for me, Gertie!" he cried, rapturously; "and to think that I was idiot enough to fancy that you had left off caring for me! The last two days I've been utterly wretched, and to-day I could bear it no longer, and made up my mind I would come over quite early and have a long talk with you, and tell you if you really liked that man better than— No, I won't finish. I shall never again doubt you, darling. Make haste back to the house, did you say? Oh, yes, I had forgotten all about the lion and lioness. It sounds rather funny, though, the two escaping together, doesn't it? Oh, and such a strange thing happened on my way here! I'll tell you all about it as we go along." He paused for a moment, and then suddenly broke into a loud, merry laugh, saying: "Oh, Gertie, to my dying day I don't think I shall ever forget how

funny it was to hear you proclaiming to the pine-tops in that high quavering voice, 'I feel, I feel, I feel, I feel like a morning star!'"

CHAPTER III.

THE clock on the mantelpiece over Sir George's head struck seven. Sir George awakened with a start, feeling that he had terribly overslept himself.

"Confound it!" he cried, seizing the poker and hammering the fire, which had burnt black and hollow. "Why on earth did no one wake me?"

"He's awake," whispered a voice just outside the door; "I heard him 'confounding' some one or something."

Then the door opened, and Johnson entered bearing a lamp, followed by Gertie and Vivian, the latter with a telegram in his hand.

"For you, Sir George," he said, as he shook hands. "I came by it in a curious fashion."

Sir George yawned and rubbed his eyes.

"Confound it!" he said again. "Why are you all buzzing about me like so many bees? And why on earth, Johnson, didn't you come in and wake me half an hour ago?"

Johnson, in the act of replenishing the fire, paused, coal-scuttle in hand.

"I don't know, Sir George," he answered, without moving a muscle.

"I picked up your telegram in the road," pursued Vivian. "It was a funny affair altogether. I took it into my head to walk over this afternoon, and came by a short cut across the fields. Just as I was about to get into the high-road through a gap in the hedge I saw some one coming along from the village; I think it must have been Jacob, the postboy. He was whistling very loud, and had a big lantern in his hand. Naturally I could see him better than he could see me, for I was in the shadow of the hedge. I had just lighted a cigar, and was puffing very hard to keep it alight, and I suppose all he could see was a red spot shining out of the darkness. At any rate, he suddenly gave a loud yell, dropped his lantern, dropped your telegram, and took to his heels."

Meantime Sir George had opened the envelope, and was reading the message.

"'Lion has escaped, and has started on road to A.' Ah! that's all right," he said, turning to Vivian. "That's my nephew, Lionel Grant, you know; we always call him Lion. His mother has been in a

dreadful state of mind about him. He has weak lungs, and when she heard how bad the influenza was about here, she wrote to me asking me to send him home to her at Aberdeen at once—that is, if he were fit to travel. I wrote to Price—that's the man who is coaching him for Sandhurst—yesterday to know if Lion had escaped the— Why, Gertie, what on earth's the matter with you? Have you lost your senses?"

Gertie had suddenly broken into the loudest and merriest peal of laughter of which she was capable.

"I see, I see, I see," she exclaimed, clapping her hands.

All in a flash Vivian seemed to "see" also, for he suddenly joined in her merriment. Johnson, no doubt, also began to "see," for he silently and hurriedly left the room. And then, when they explained matters to Sir George, he laughed louder and longer than either of them.

"I wonder if Gertie will ever forget what a selfish hound I showed myself?" cogitated Dick, as he laid his head on his pillow that night.

"By Jove! I've let slip a splendid opportunity for distinguishing myself," sighed Colonel Eden, as he administered his nightly dose of brilliantine to his moustache. "I think I'll make tracks for the North tomorrow, or I shall have that pair of young fools sharpening their wits on me."

If, however, he could have heard Gertie's whisper to her lover as she said her good-night to him under the hall lamp that night, his apprehensions might have been allayed.

"We'll let them all off, Vivian; we won't make fun of one of them," she said, "for 'I feel, I feel, I feel' that one way or another we have all made ourselves ridiculous."

And Vivian, looking down into her eyes, answered tenderly:

"It's a ridiculousness, darling, which, so far as you and I are concerned, I pray may continue to the very last hour of our lives."

MISS JANE'S MISTAKE.

By MARGARET MOULE.

CHAPTER I.

"I SCARCELY think the child's presence will annoy our brother so much as we feared, Jane, she is so quiet."

"Theodore is fortunately very much

employed; and the child is beyond the age when children are absolutely nolsy. I believe that her age is seventeen."

Miss Jane Langdon, as she spoke, bent down before the fire by which she stood. She was tall, and had to bend some distance. Her height was somewhat accentuated by the long, white dimity morning-gown, trimmed with tambour-work of her own execution, in which she was dressed.

"She has the appearance of a younger child. She is, very properly, dressed in accordance with her size."

Miss Langdon's younger sister, Miss Lucia, also wore a morning-gown trimmed with tambour-work; but as Miss Lucia was delicate, and the October airs were chill, hers was of a warm brown stuff.

"I am, after making acquaintance with her, not so much opposed to the project of her living here as I was when Theodore first informed us of his intention."

"Nor I, Jane. Indeed, I think it possible that pleasure as well as profit may accrue to ourselves from the hours we spend in the education of—"

Miss Lucia Langdon broke off suddenly. The door of the breakfast-parlour, as they termed it, in which the two Misses Langdon were standing, opened suddenly, and a little figure came in. The girl who possessed it was small, slight, and very shy and frightened-looking. She wore a short black frock, cut low in the neck, and with short sleeves. Her face was small, but all its features were regular. She had a delicate colour, very pretty brown hair, and a pair of frank blue eyes.

"Good morning," she said, approaching, shyly.

"Good morning, Marion," responded Miss Jane and Miss Lucia Langdon simultaneously.

Then Miss Jane turned to the girl.

"This morning, Marion," she said, impressively, "as it is the first, we will not speak of rules or regulations. To-morrow, I should wish you to make a curtsy to my sister and one to myself when you wish us good morning."

"Yes," said the girl, in a shy tone; "yes, Miss Jane."

"It is the invariable rule for all young gentlewomen," continued Miss Jane Langdon. "And my sister and I are anxious, Marion, to impart to you the manners and breeding we ourselves received in our youth."

"Thank you," said the girl, still more

shyly, seeing that an answer was expected.

"We hope to make you happy, Marion, also," added Miss Lucia, more gently, catching sight of a rather frightened look in the blue eyes.

"Thank you," said the girl, for the second time.

"After breakfast——" began Miss Jane; but she was, as her sister had been just before, suddenly interrupted, and again the interruption came from the opening of the door.

This time the figure which entered was a man's, and the man was, like Miss Jane, tall. He was also dark, with a thin, clean-shaven face, and an abstracted look in his eyes.

"Good morning," he said to the two Misses Langdon.

They each in turn responded slightly differently.

"Good morning, brother," said Miss Lucia.

"Good morning, Theodore," said Miss Jane.

Then he glanced up in an embarrassed manner at the girl, who stood shyly in front of the hearthrug, her hands nervously clasped in front of her frock, and instantly glanced away again.

"Good morning, Marion," he said.

"Good morning," she answered, even more shyly than she had answered the two ladies.

Without looking at her again, Mr. Theodore Langdon, who was in theory the master of the house, took his place at the waiting breakfast-table in the place befitting such a position; while Miss Jane, who was in practice the mistress of the house and of its master too, took her seat behind a massive copper urn with silver fittings. Miss Lucia seated herself on one side, and motioned to the blue-eyed girl to follow her example on the other.

Three of the four people now seated round it had assembled at that breakfast-table for the last twenty years. Mr. Langdon the elder, the father of Jane, Lucia, and Theodore, had died when his son Theodore was about twenty-five. He had been a man of means, following no profession, and had left to his son the means, the grey stone house in which they had all been born, and the—nominal—care of his two elder sisters.

The house was situated on the outskirts of Maybury, a quiet Devonshire village;

but Theodore Langdon had taken up the charge without the least demur.

A hundred years ago it was a natural circumstance enough that a man should settle down for life in an isolated country place; and the isolation was particularly well suited to a man of Theodore Langdon's reserved habits and retiring tastes. These habits and tastes were summed up by his sisters in the words, "Theodore was always bookish." What line this "bookishness" took they would have been puzzled to state. Indeed, it was known to no one, unless to the Vicar of Maybury, a cynical old bachelor, and Mr. Langdon's most intimate friend. All that was known was that Mr. Langdon spent his days chiefly in his study, only issuing therefrom for meals; his daily ride; a constitutional walk in the garden; or an evening call at the Vicarage.

The twenty years which had led them from thirty and thirty-five to fifty and fifty-five had passed equally simply for Miss Lucia and Miss Jane. The latter ruled with a strong hand all the domestic affairs in the grey stone house; the former knew no greater pleasure than to obey.

Into this placid, unhindered current of three lives had fallen, a fortnight before, a disturbing element, which acted on its even flow like a stone suddenly thrown into a slowly moving stream might do. From the only relative of the trio, a ne'er-do-well cousin, who was a landed proprietor in Ireland, with more land than income, had come a letter, written at his request from his dying bed, in which he commended to the care of her only relation his young daughter, Marion. Mr. Tennant ended by entreating Theodore to give the child the care of a father. Theodore read the letter to his sisters; and Miss Jane's prompt comment on it was made almost before it was ended.

"You will send the child to school at once," she said, with that masterful decision which always ruled the trio. But, to her utter amaze—she could not well have been more amazed had Theodore thrown the letter in her face—he said, firmly:

"I have written to Gerald Tennant's executors that his daughter will find her home here. She will arrive on Tuesday week."

Miss Lucia's tremulous "Here, Theodore!" was swallowed up in Miss Jane's emphatic "What are you thinking of, Theodore? How could you be tried by the presence of a child in the house?"

"I, personally, shall not find much

difference from the circumstance, I imagine," he had responded, calmly; "but I have to request that you, Jane, will give the child attention. Poor Tennant, as you hear, says that her education has been perforce much neglected. A little of your influence and your tuition, if you will have the great goodness to impart it, will, doubtless, work wonders. As to preparations for her physical comfort, of such I should not presume to speak to you."

Miss Jane, a trifle mollified by the implied compliment to herself, but still in a state of agitation which nearly caused the velvet band which she wore clasped round her throat "in case of chill" to break with the convulsive gasp she gave, could only sit still and watch her brother rise, refold the letter slowly, and leave the room.

"Tuesday week, the twenty-ninth," he said, quietly, as he closed the door.

With his departure Miss Jane cast herself upon Miss Lucia, as upon a well-tried rock amid a sea of perturbation. Miss Lucia quietly bore the contact, and calmed her sister's mind. This last was by no means accomplished all at once, though. It involved much representation, much skilful argument, and much reasoning.

Neither of the sisters ever contemplated an appeal to their brother. The effect of his unexpected self-assertion had been as crushing as an earthquake in their front garden might have been; and they prepared for Marion Tennant's arrival in silence as far as he was concerned. Miss Jane, with a reaction of feeling as strong as was her character, suddenly made up her mind that this new duty that had fallen to her lot should be carried out with the utmost thoroughness, and spent, for the whole of the intervening fortnight, sleepless nights, during which she concocted schemes for what she invariably termed "the education of Marion." These had scarcely been finally formulated when, on the evening before her untrained entrance into the breakfast-parlour, Marion Tennant had been taken, shy, cold, and frightened, from the coach, and driven in the gig to Laurel Cottage—Miss Lucia's poetic name for the grey stone house—by the one old manservant of the establishment.

"You will follow me to the store-room, Marion, if you please," Miss Jane said, as she rose from behind the copper urn, at the termination of a meal which had taken place in complete silence, save for an observation

from Miss Lucia that she must go and see her mantua-maker, an observation which Miss Jane met with the contempt such trifles deserved. "I will begin your domestic education at once," she went on, in a tone which caused Marion to shake and tremble, as with unknown dread. "Walk quietly, or you will disturb Mr. Langdon," she continued.

But Mr. Langdon had left the breakfast-parlour for his study, taking the "news-letter" with him; and Marion's stumble over the footstool was unknown to and therefore unheeded by him.

CHAPTER II.

MARION'S entrance into the store-room that morning may be said to have been a figurative, as well as a literal entrance. With it she entered upon the scheme to which Miss Jane had given the earnest concentration of her peculiarly earnest mind. The scheme had been written out the night before, by Miss Jane, in a small pointed Italian hand; and now, on a sheet of foolscap paper, it faced Marion on the store-room wall.

The terms were general, rather than descriptive.

The morning was divided into three portions. From nine to eleven was devoted—in the delicate handwriting—to "Domestic Employ." From eleven to one the foolscap sheet displayed the inscription, "Mental Improvement." From one to two was to be given up to "Exercise." Two was the dinner-hour at Laurel Cottage, and the after hours were a repetition of the morning. But at five o'clock there was an inscription which was written rather indistinctly, and of which every letter in the word looked as if it deprecated its own existence. The word was "Recreation." At nine o'clock the day at Laurel Cottage practically terminated, with supper and prayers, after which Marion was to go to bed. These were the written rules. There was, however, an unwritten injunction running, as it were, all through them. This unwritten law became instantly to Marion, by Miss Jane's unceasing reiteration of it, far more real and stringent than any of the former. It was that she was "never to be in Mr. Langdon's way." Whatever might happen, or be neglected, this command was to be kept before her eyes. "To annoy Mr. Langdon" was to be the one unpardonable offence.

Marion went through the hours of that

first day with a diffident, anxious acquiescence in every rule, and a terrible fear of infringing this last and most stringent of all. At dinner-time she dared not even glance in Mr. Langdon's direction; she could scarcely find voice to answer him when he offered her more roast mutton; and at tea-time, when Miss Jane desired her to hand him the crumpets, she did it with a carefully averted face, lest even that trifling reminder of her presence might seem aggressive. After prayers, to her infinite relief, he disappeared without a word, and her good-nights were made to Miss Jane and Miss Lucia alone.

In her own room, which, though small, Miss Jane had made very comfortable for the child, Marion sat down on the floor at the end of the bed, and leaned her head against the small hair travelling trunk, which had brought all her worldly goods from her home in Leinster to the grey stone house in Devonshire, and began to try and think things over; and find out, what she almost doubted, whether in this utterly strange world she were indeed the same girl who had left that home three days before.

Marion had through all her seventeen years been her father's constant companion, and his rather spoiled darling. She had had her own way in everything; she had in the half-ruined old Irish house done exactly as she liked all day long, learned lessons or not, according as Father Clare, the parish priest, had had time to impart them, ridden with her father, and ruled old Bridget, their one servant, with the hand of an over-indulged but sweet-natured child.

And now, the girl thought, everything was ended. She could never feel the same or be the same any more. In this dreadful prison house; with these terrible, solemn, methodical people; hemmed in on every side by rules and regulations, how could she live; how could she spend her days? She hid her face in her hands, and sobbed sharply, as she thought of her father, Bridget, and her home. Then, with a quick reaction, inherent in that impulsive Irish nature, she told herself that everything might have been much worse; her most terrible fear might have been realised—she might have been sent to school.

The word "school" contained for Marion undefined horrors, compared to which the tortures of the Inquisition would have appeared trifling to her imagination. She

said to herself that Mr. Langdon had been very good to take her into his own house, when he might so easily, and with so much less trouble to himself, have sent her to school. It was kind, very kind of him not to have sent her to school. And in her gratitude she resolved even more firmly than she had done when Miss Jane spoke to her that same morning, that never in any way would she "annoy Mr. Langdon"; and that all her most diligent pains should be directed to taking care not to be "in his way." With this reflection, the girl undressed, placed the rushlight Miss Jane had given her on the floor, and laying her head, whose pretty outline was unspoiled by the stiff nightcap border round her little face, on its pillow, was soon asleep.

After this first day, the weeks and months rolled on almost imperceptibly for Marion.

The "domestic employ," as conducted by Miss Jane, taught the girl everything necessary for a woman to know; of which teaching Marion stood not a little in need. The "mental improvement" taught her many strange things. It was chiefly carried on from the "Young Female's Preceptor," and another volume known as the "Gentlewoman's Guide." These, with a treatise on the use of the globes, and a great deal of elementary arithmetic through the medium of Miss Jane's housekeeping bills, had introduced a solid stratum of what it would be scarcely correct to call facts—for modern research has found much of the works in question imperfect—but certainly information in Marion's mind. Her "recreation" consisted of rambles in the garden in fine weather, and of exploration in the garret when it was wet, and her "exercise" of a daily constitutional with Miss Lucia and Miss Jane.

Only two untoward incidents broke the even flow of the days; and these were two occasions on which she had very narrowly escaped "annoying Mr. Langdon."

On one occasion she had been sent into the kitchen garden by Miss Jane to gather herbs. It was a bright, mild day; and Marion had knelt down on the gravelled path, and turned up her white worked apron to hold the herbs in. She had gathered nearly an apronful, and was singing softly to herself over her work, when, glancing up, she suddenly saw Mr. Langdon coming down the same path. He was entirely unaware of her proximity, for he was engrossed in a book; but Marion, terrified beyond ex-

pression lest he should find her "in the way," caught up her herbs and rushed breathlessly away, to arrive crimson and panting in Miss Jane's store-room; while Mr. Langdon, glancing around, and thinking vaguely that he must have startled a bird in the hedge, sauntered calmly past the herb-bed.

The second was more important, and to Marion more alarming. One day when Mr. Langdon was out, Marion had been sent by Miss Jane to the study with a parcel of books, which had arrived by waggon from London for him. She went up the narrow stone passage which led to the study door, and as a matter of form, and to reassure herself that she could safely enter, she knocked. To her unspeakable horror, Mr. Langdon's voice said, abstractedly, "Come in." Marion nearly dropped the books in her fright. She stood in crimson confusion, until Miss Jane, who chanced at the moment to ascertain her brother's presence within doors, came up the passage and summoned her hurriedly thence.

With these two exceptions her life in the grey stone house was so placid and monotonous, that it was Christmas, and Marion, in a large black beaver bonnet, which was like a dark picture-frame to her little delicate face, was listening to the bass-viol and flutes of the church choir playing "Hark, the herald angels sing," before she had realised that she had really come to live in Maybury. And Easter had followed, and the black beaver was changed for a white bonnet, of Miss Jane's careful providing, almost before the girl had noticed the lengthening of the spring days.

It was nearly a week after Easter, and a lovely spring day. The primroses and the daffodils, the white "March May," and the red-flowering currant were all a-bloom together in the garden of the grey house; and Marion found it very difficult to cut short her "recreation" at the proper time, and come in. She did so, however, with a great effort, carrying in her hand the small bunch of flowers which Miss Jane had told her she might gather for her own room. She was going rather slowly upstairs when, as she passed Miss Jane's bedroom door, she heard herself called. She knocked timidly, and, receiving a response, went in, rather alarmed. Miss Jane's bedroom, both from its intrinsic characteristics of intense neatness and practicalness, and from the fact that it

was very seldom entered by her or any one in the daytime, was a somewhat alarming place.

To-day, however, as Marion opened the door, a very unwonted and unexpected sight met her eyes. On one tall, straight chair at the foot of the bed sat Miss Lucia; on another tall, straight chair, facing her precisely, sat Miss Jane. Between them was an open trunk smelling of lavender; at its side were piles of clothing—equally lavender-scented silk and linen.

"Marion," said Miss Jane, "Miss Lucia and I, some days since, received an invitation to spend three weeks at the house of a relative in Yorkshire. We have decided to accept it, and shall set out to-morrow. I wish you, now, under our joint direction, to assist us by placing these things in this prepared receptacle; and when you have done so, I have a few words to say to you."

Marion laid her flowers down, and instantly knelt down by the trunk. She was, though surprised at the news itself that she had heard, not in the least surprised at any delay in imparting it to her. Her life in the grey stone house had taught her that no well-mannered young person should expect to be kept informed of the proceedings of her elders. She placed the clothes deftly enough in the sweet-smelling trunk, and folded and laid carefully on the top silk gowns and pelisses and Sunday scarves.

When all was done: "Marion," Miss Jane said again, "you will have no further duties during our absence than your ordinary ones. These you will fulfil precisely as usual. Agatha has received my orders to serve up dinners at her own discretion; and Ellen will need no assistance in the performance of her customary routine." Agatha and Ellen were the cook and housemaid, who had occupied these situations respectively for twenty-five and thirty years. "I have, therefore, no special directions to give you, save one. I desire that you should pour out Mr. Langdon's tea at breakfast and at tea-time; and, Marion, I need hardly reiterate the direction of which you must now thoroughly comprehend the importance, namely, our desire that you should in no way be an annoyance to Mr. Langdon. We wish you, beyond all things, never to be in his way, during our absence. You fully understand this?"

"Yes, Miss Jane," answered the girl. Then, at a word of dismissal, she left the

room, and she ascended the flight of stairs that led to her own room, a little pale and slightly trembling with her anxiety to carry out Miss Jane's wishes.

The next day she helped Ellen to fasten and cord the trunk; and Peter, the old manservant, drove it and his two mistresses to meet the "Northern Mail," which passed near Maybury twice a week at three o'clock in the afternoon.

CHAPTER III.

It was half-past seven in the morning, and Marion stood alone in her room. She was fastening her frock with very shaking fingers, her small face was pale, and her blue eyes were very round and very wide with fear.

To her infinite relief, Mr. Langdon had not taken tea at home the night before. After his sisters had set out, he had taken his hat and gone out, leaving word with Ellen that he should spend the evening at the Vicarage, and he had not returned thence until long after Marion was in bed and asleep.

It had seemed to her last night that she could not be thankful enough for this circumstance. It seemed to her this morning that she could not regret it enough. It would have been over; the worst part of the terrible ordeal before her—the first time—would have been accomplished, if she had been enabled by circumstances to undergo it last night. All night long, at intervals, the girl had waked, always with the sense of something difficult and oppressive to be met in the morning; and even when she slept, the same consciousness had coloured her dreams. To pour out Mr. Langdon's tea—to be left quite alone with Mr. Langdon! The position seemed to poor Marion too terrible to put into words, almost. She should do something foolish and thoughtless; she should do exactly what she ought not, and she should leave undone all she ought to do; she knew she should. She should, oh, she knew she should "annoy Mr. Langdon," she said to herself, with a shiver of dread.

The horrors of the situation accumulated so fast that by the time she had reached the last fastening of her frock, not only her hands but her whole slight frame was trembling with apprehension. She put on her long worked apron very slowly, and giving a last look in the little oval glass, which was all Miss Jane considered necessary for a young girl's toilette, she

moved towards the door. For one terrible instant she felt as if she could not open it—could not leave her room to face what was before her. There was no escape, however, it must be faced; and with a strong effort at resolution, she turned the handle and went downstairs into the breakfast-parlour. It was empty. The urn was hissing and the breakfast was ready, but the master of the house had not yet appeared. The room looked particularly cheerful in the sunny spring morning; everything was bright, shining, and pleasant to the eyes; and by no means the least pleasant sight was the girlish figure who stood, diffidently and shyly, waiting behind the great urn. Marion had grown taller since her arrival at Laurel Cottage; her frocks had lately been somewhat lengthened, and though her hair was done in a severe mode, which Miss Jane considered suitable to her years, no severity could rob it of its own beauty.

Precisely as the clock struck eight Mr. Langdon entered the room. He looked around absently, as if vaguely missing Miss Jane; and then, all at once, his eyes seemed to fall on the little figure behind the urn. He started slightly as they did so. "Good morning, Marion," he said, in a tone which contained a distinct element of surprise. "Good morning," she responded, very timidly, and then, as he prepared to sit down at his own end, she slipped into Miss Jane's great chair at the same moment.

There was a little silence, while Marion dipped the rims of the two cups in water and warmed them; and Mr. Langdon uncovered the breakfast-dish before him.

"Will you have some of this?" he began, half hesitatingly.

But Marion did not hear his query. She was looking round the urn at him, with a face appealing and attractive in its anxiety.

"If you please, sir," she said, "I—it is very wrong of me, but I have quite forgotten." She paused, her voice was getting unsteady with her distress.

"Forgotten what?" he said, curiously.

"Miss Jane's directions, sir. I have forgotten all she told me about your tea. Please, sir, do you take two lumps of sugar or three? I have put three. I am very sorry indeed to give you this annoyance."

"It is not a matter of annoyance, my dear," he said. "Don't let it trouble you in the least. I take two lumps. But it is of no consequence. I am sure the tea you give me will be very good," he added, with

a reassuring tone, and a smile—a very pleasant smile.

Marion could scarcely believe her eyes. Mr. Langdon had not only shown no signs of annoyance at her dreadful mistake, but had smiled at her—actually smiled. He never smiled; he must have done it now on purpose to make her less frightened at her stupidity. And a quick glow of gratitude ran through Marion's heart.

"You will let me give you some breakfast?" he added, rising to take the cup she had poured out. Marion was prepared to rise herself and hand it him; but he was too quick for her. "Certainly not," he said, as he observed her intent. "I will come for it."

He took it from her hand, and he was near enough to observe the bright colour which agitation had brought to her cheeks. Marion had rarely any colour, and this bright, unusual flush made her always attractive little face suddenly very pretty.

He helped her to some fish, carrying it himself to her—to her great embarrassment. She thanked him with a face which was more rosy still with confusion. Then there was a silence, only broken by the sound of Miss Lucia's canary hopping backwards and forwards in his cage in the window. Marion's thoughts were very busy in the silence. She hoped and trusted that she was not annoying Mr. Langdon; but it was impossible to know, she said to herself, in great agitation; he was so kind, he would never let her know, however much he was tried by her.

Mr. Langdon's thoughts were busy, too, in the silence; but they were very different.

"Marion," he said, ten minutes later.

Marion started violently; now, she thought, he was going to tell her to go away—to ask her, perhaps, why she was so long over her breakfast, or tell her that his tea was, after all, quite undrinkable.

"Are you in the habit of taking the air?" he continued, in a rather unusual tone.

But Marion did not notice its unusualness. Her heart gave a great bound of relief, and then another strong throb of gratitude. Mr. Langdon was indeed kind, she thought, to take such interest in her—astonishingly kind.

"I am going to take the air in the garden, sir," she said. "Miss Jane desires me not to walk beyond it, by myself, during her absence. Thank you, sir," she added, feeling too shy to put her thanks

for his kindness into definite words; and yet desiring to express it somehow. There was another silence; Mr. Langdon drew the bread towards him and cut some slices in a somewhat embarrassed manner, and apparently to no particular end. He had toast himself, and Marion's plate was supplied with the same.

"Do you—have you ever taken horse exercise—can you ride?" he said, cutting a slice into minute morsels as he spoke.

Marion looked up from her plate, her cheeks, her very forehead crimson with excitement, her blue eyes aflame with eagerness.

"Ride!" she exclaimed. "I haven't ridden for—I love riding," she said, breaking off with an apparent effort to be collected and coherent. "I can ride—at least I can keep on—any horse; father said so. There was Brown Bess, and there was Colleen, and there was Diamond—I rode them all," she ended, her excitement again overcoming her desire for self-possession. It was as if a remembrance too exciting and vivid for expression had brought the real Marion to light for the moment, and torn aside the veil of shrouding shyness and diffidence.

Then all at once she seemed to come back from that eager life and to remember where she was and all her present surroundings. She coloured again violently; but it was the colour of embarrassment now, not of excitement.

"I am very sorry, sir," she said. "I trust I have not annoyed you. I forgot myself."

"Annoyed me!" he said. "Indeed, you have done nothing of the kind. What I wished"—he broke off—"the fact is, I have an engagement at Ashley Grove this morning," he continued. He did not state that that engagement had been made while he was eating his breakfast. "And, if you will give me that pleasure, I should be glad if you will accompany me. Dapple is quite a safe mount for a lady," he added, "and I—Lucia used to have a side-saddle."

Dapple and Conqueror, two neat cobs, constituted the stud of the grey stone house. Mr. Langdon rode them alternately, and in the interval one or other was driven in the gig.

Again the flush of excitement rushed over Marion's face. She had often been into the stable surreptitiously, and longingly looked at both horses, especially Dapple, whom she fed with sugar and apples when she could get either from Agatha.

"Ride Dapple!" she exclaimed. "I should—oh, I should be extremely happy, sir," she added, relapsing into the formal phrases which seemed to her most fitting.

"That's right," he said. "Then I will tell Peter to have the horses at the door at eleven. You will be in readiness?"

"I will, indeed, sir," she said, joyfully. "It is indeed kind of you," she added, timidly, and she rose from her chair, seeing that he moved his in order to do the same.

With the movement an involuntary start of recollection seemed to come to the girl. She turned to Mr. Langdon with a frightened look on her face.

"At eleven, sir?" she said, in a tone the alarm and disappointment of which was a curious contrast to her tone of a moment before. "At eleven I should be at my studies. Miss Jane so especially desired me to neglect nothing. What will she say, sir?"

Mr. Langdon appeared to be examining a slight fracture on the carved back of his chair, for his face was bent over it, so that if he were at all confused by this view of the case, Marion did not see it.

"Never mind Miss Jane," he said, tersely. "You may leave that to me," and Marion almost ran out of the room to look for her long unused riding-habit.

CHAPTER IV.

"I TRUST your foot is resting in comfort, Lucia?"

"I thank you, Jane, in very tolerable comfort; and we must reach Maybury before very long now. If I do not deceive myself, there are but two more stages."

Miss Jane and Miss Lucia were the only inside passengers in the coach. It was the "Northern Mail"; it was on its way towards Maybury from Yorkshire, and it had entered on the third and last day of its progress.

It was nearly three months since they had set out to visit their friends in Yorkshire by that same "Northern Mail," and the day that would draw to its close before they reached Maybury was a lovely summer day in the first week of July. The causes of this unexpected delay in their return were twofold. In the first place, their visit, originally proposed to extend over the brief space of four weeks, was, at the pressing insistence of their hosts, lengthened to six. Both ladies had been placidly content to remain for the lengthened stay. Their hosts were very kind, the place was

very picturesque, and altogether no enjoyments were wanting. Then, in the sixth week, Miss Lucia had had the great misfortune to sprain her ankle very severely while getting into a carriage, and this had necessitated a further delay of a fortnight more before she was fit to undertake a journey. But even this did not disturb them greatly, except on Miss Lucia's account. Their news from Maybury, though slight, was perfectly satisfactory. Everything appeared to be going on precisely as it should, from Mr. Langdon's letters. Marion had not written; Miss Jane had desired her "not to waste her time" in that exercise. Much letter-writing was, she said, a frequent snare to the young.

"Theodore has not mentioned the child of late; indeed, he has scarcely alluded to her in his letters to me," said Miss Jane to Miss Lucia, as the coach wended its steady way towards home. "That is, I am glad to think, a token that she has observed my words, and given him no annoyance."

"I am sure she has not; she is a good child," responded Miss Lucia, warmly. "I am sure she will have fully deserved the silk dress-piece you have so kindly brought for her, Jane."

It was about half-past five when the coach stopped at the cross-roads where old Peter and the gig stood in waiting. He greeted his mistresses with a touch to his cap, and helped them and their possessions into the gig in silence.

No sooner was she seated, however, than Miss Jane began to shower upon him questions concerning the grey stone house and its welfare, especially the welfare of its master. But to each and all of her questions old Peter had but one answer:

"Caught cold o' Thursday, mistress. Been deaf o' both sides since."

Miss Jane, after his last repetition of this, had begun turning over in her mind some remedies, and was just going to propound them when the gig stopped at the grey stone house.

She got down, and with Peter's help assisted Miss Lucia. Ellen stood curtseying and opening the door for them, and Miss Jane caught sight of a white ribbon in the woman's cap. "Frisolous minx!" she exclaimed, mentally and inappropriately. And she resolved that its existence should be a thing of the past before the world was a day older.

"Where is your master?" she asked. She was a little surprised that her brother

had not come out to meet them, but instantly determining that he had probably, in deep reflection or study, forgotten the time, decided, unwonted though the action was, to go and announce herself to him. "In the study, I suppose," she added. Marion she did not ask for, knowing well that it was the hour when the girl was engaged in "mental improvement."

She scarcely waited for Ellen's assent; but, leaving Miss Lucia in the parlour, walked up the stone passage and knocked at her brother's door.

The "Come in," was rather uncertain. But Miss Jane went in, and then, for the first time in her whole life, Miss Jane felt faint. By the window, fenced in, as it were, by his heavy writing-table, stood her brother. Beside him, half hidden by the window-curtain, but with her hand in his, stood Marion, and the hand that was not in his clasped the curtain and wore a gold ring.

"Is it possible that you are annoying Mr. Langdon, Marion?" said Miss Jane, in a tone that was an indescribable mixture of wrath, amaze, and horror.

Mr. Langdon came forward from behind the table, still holding Marion's hand.

"She is not annoying me," he said. "In fact, so far from annoying me, she pleases me so greatly that—I hope this will not annoy you, Jane—she is my wife."

But Miss Jane had fainted away.

"DORINDA."

By BARBARA DEMPSTER.

Author of "Little White-Cap," "A Spring Moon," "The Bridge House," "Tabitha's Choice," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

"SHE's a good little girl, and looks it," he said.

The Duchess uttered a faint shriek.

"Good! Looks good! And you calmly ask me to chaperon a girl who 'looks good'! With Sunday-schools written in her eyes, and mothers' meetings in the set of her frocks! My dear Myles, I would as soon chaperon an angel whose flapping wings would be always creating inconvenient draughts, to say nothing of being hopelessly in the way in a brougham. 'Looks good.' She had better be freckled and have sandy hair. What is the matter with you? To ask me to 'take round' a

girl who sits glued to one seat all the evening; who never by any chance is asked for more than two dances by any man in a night; who doesn't know what to say when she is spoken to; who sticks to your side, a flat, hopeless, dull sort of thing, through the whole season—like the skeleton at the Egyptian feasts—like the ghost of your own sins—never to be got rid of! No, Myles, I will not do it!"

And the Duchess looked quite energetic as she sat up in her silk-covered lounge.

The young man laughed.

"She's really not so bad as that, and it is an awful life she leads in that dreary old Derbyshire house, with not a man within speaking distance but the parson and doctor—with no companion in the house. She used to have an aunt and a governess, but they both died last year, just in time to prevent her being ruined utterly. She would have become a deaconess, or a nurse, or something else, by this. And that extraordinary old uncle of hers, whom she only sees at meal-times! You can't imagine what a life it is for a girl. Besides, she is a distant cousin of yours, and there is no one else to take her up."

"And pray how did you manage to win so much of the confidence of this simple country maiden?" asked the Duchess, with a quick, keen look from under her darkened eyebrows.

"Well, I don't exactly know; only, you see, she is allowed to visit at the Vicarage; and then, being laid up there for several weeks after that hunting accident, I had opportunities of finding out what sort of life she was leading. We used to talk of things when she came to have tea with the Vicar's wife in the afternoons, and I told her I should speak to you about her."

"I see," nodding her head; "you put all sorts of notions into her simple country head, and then expect me to realise them. I have known you since you were a baby, Myles; but I didn't expect you would take advantage of me like this."

"But you forget. She is one of your own relations. And it does seem a little rough on her that, just for the eccentricities of a cranky misanthrope of an old man like her uncle, she should be left out of everything."

The Duchess looked at him again.

"She is not pretty, or you would have said so. She is not fascinating, or you would have found something else to call

her but 'good.' Left still to find the motive of your request. Let me think. Now you have recalled her existence to my mind, I remember that she is an heiress."

"I can't afford to marry a poor girl," he said, meeting her eyes.

"So that's it. What about—the other?"

The question was plainly a shock, for his self-control failed him for a second. He rose and stood looking down into the fire.

"There is no other," he said, easily, facing her again, that momentary disturbance gone from his calm face. "And Dorinda would like to come to town for the season."

Then he smiled slightly as a vision of a slim girl, standing with wind-ruffled hair in a country garden, rose up before him. Her frock fitted atrociously, her shoes were clumsy, and she had been unable, till he taught her of other things, to talk of anything but the local news, and parochial duties and festivities. But her eyes were as limpid as an innocent child's, and they had looked up to him with such simple faith and unconscious admiration, that somewhere down in his own worldly heart he had felt a queer sensation, half laughter, half shame.

"You have asked me a great deal, Myles Underhill," said the Duchess; "but I will undertake this impossible country maiden for you."

CHAPTER II.

DORINDA VANE received the invitation from the distant cousin whom she had never seen. She read it one February morning as she stood in the old-fashioned garden in which already were showing the signs of spring.

She knew to whom she was really indebted for that letter from her kinswoman who lived so far off in that great world of society and fashion, and she blushed and laughed, while her eyes became beautiful with the shy happiness that shone in them.

It was his world into which she was asked to come—that wonderful world of pleasure, in which was to be found all that was grand and beautiful in art, and literature, and science; that delightful world, in which men and women were perpetually enjoying themselves, and yet were in unison with all the great intellectual thought and progress of the day. At least

this was the impression he had left with her of that brilliant society world of which he was a citizen. A glorified earthly paradise, in which she would dance with and listen to him, and every day learn new lessons from the teaching of his lips, and every day, in her humility and ignorance, try to model herself upon other women who had had such intellectual and artistic advantages of which she, in her secluded country existence, had not even dreamed till he had come into it and opened her eyes. She was full of dread lest her uncle should say "no." But perhaps in his selfish, absorbed life there was still some affection for her; perhaps his conscience pricked him as he was roused by the Duchess's invitation to the consciousness of the unnatural life the young girl was leading in that great, sombre house, for he consented, and then, after giving her leave to buy everything she needed, and telling her that she was rich enough to tempt fortune-hunters, and that she must not make a fool of herself, he felt that he had done all that could be expected of him, and retired again into his taciturn, hypochondriacal shell.

Dorinda was divided between delight and something like awed dismay as she found herself, with a large cheque in her hand, making preparations for her visit to town.

Those preparations nearly proved fatal to her dreams.

The first impulse of the Duchess, when a week or two later Dorinda crossed her London threshold, was to send her back straight there and then to that out-of-the-world Derbyshire home.

Perhaps if Underhill had not been present to help receive her guest, she would have done so.

But he seemed so superbly unconscious of the hopeless hat, of the dateless jacket—the latest fashion of the little country town—and was so gently patient with the blushing shyness of the country girl, that she braced herself up to emulate him, and decided to let her stay the night, at least, under her roof. The result of their endeavours was such that Dorinda, whose heart had failed her terribly at the last moment, regained some of her vanished courage, and laughed once or twice so prettily and naturally, and looked at the Duchess with such honest, trustful eyes, that before the morning came the Duchess decided to see what a week of life and a course of London shops could effect for her.

The country town clothes were ruthlessly banished. The best tailors, and milliners, and dressmakers tried their hands on Dorinda. She felt appalled at first before this, to her, reckless extravagance. She had many prickings of conscience on the subject of vanity; but she found that she had plenty of money to spend, and the result of the smart frocks and hats mitigated the reproaches of her conscience. She had many severe lessons of social training from the Duchess, and was eventually presented at the first Drawing-Room, and crossed the boundary of the great society world.

The results were fairly satisfactory—better than the poor Duchess had first believed could be possible.

It being known that she was an heiress, she received a good deal of attention of a certain kind. Personally, she was not a success. She was good, and sweet, and true; but those are not interesting qualities to society in general, and the men were too much occupied in falling down before beauty or smartness, or even less holy divinities, to take the trouble to see if there were anything worth knowing under the gentle-mannered, shy-eyed little girl, who had no pretensions to physical beauty, except the delicate freshness of youth and the spiritual refinement of a pure soul.

But a good many remembered that she was an heiress, and she was never obliged to sit out dances or to remain unattended when at any of the other fashionable gatherings which she and the Duchess attended night and day through the London season. The Duchess watched this. She began to feel alarmed for, and irritated with, the unaccountable supineness of Myles Underhill. She had no sons of her own, and was as fond of that young man as she was of any one, remembering long past days when his father and she had been lovers.

She took him to task one May afternoon when he dropped in, a privileged visitor, to pay her a visit. Dorinda, who had been to two balls the previous night and a luncheon-party that day, was lying down in her room with a bad headache.

The Duchess secretly wondered if it had another name. Underhill had been at both the balls the night before and had scarcely come near her, attaching himself to the shrine of one of the reigning divinities.

"Do you know that Dorinda has had

three proposals since the beginning of April?" she asked, abruptly.

He nodded.

"And now I should like to know what you mean by making me ask her up here to expose her to the tender mercies of all the fortune-hunters in London?" she asked, with an unusual note of irritation in her voice.

He looked at her, a slight smile in his eyes.

"What do you call me?" he asked.

"I suppose, morally speaking, you are no better than the rest of them," she said; "but, from a worldly point of view, if the child is to be married for her money, I would rather it was to you. You have faults, and plenty of them; but I do believe, Myles Underhill, that you are above taking advantage of a girl whose only folly is trusting in you well enough to put her life's happiness in your keeping."

It was a most unusual speech for the cynical, brilliant-tongued woman of the world.

The young man suspected that Dorinda herself had something to say to it. He took a turn through the room.

"That's just it," he said. "I don't want to take advantage of her, so I have kept out of it. There might have been other men, you see."

"Myles, it isn't because you don't feel strong enough?" she asked.

The veil of their society manner fell from them for an instant, and they looked at each other as man and woman.

"No," he said, with a short laugh. "Why should I be afraid? Mrs. Thwaite is very happy with her millionaire husband in Australia, and I shall be a lucky man if I win Dorinda."

"It's a curious fact, but I believe you would be. Only don't forget that Mrs. Thwaite will be coming back to England again some day." Then, with a rapid change to her ordinary manner: "And Dorinda does freckle so frightfully. I don't know what she will be like soon."

Soon Dorinda had gained a beauty which not even the freckles could mar—the happy beauty of a woman who has won the lover her heart desired.

She and Myles Underhill were married at the end of June—the month of roses. The Duchess felt depressed and irritable as Dorinda drove away with her husband.

"I won't be bothered chaperoning any more girls," she said; "I am getting too old, and it is a great trouble."

But the great London house seemed so curiously empty without Dorinda, that the Duchess was glad to leave it for fresh scenes of fashionable pleasures. And it was not for some time that she could throw off a worrying consciousness of the responsibility of the marriage she had helped to make.

CHAPTER III.

It was spring-time again; but spring was tardy and bleak.

The lance leaves of the daffodils were only just piercing the brown earth; the primroses had scarcely awakened in the most sheltered nooks of woods and hedgerows.

The ploughs were busy on the bare fields, turning up the long, deep furrows. The leafless trees hardly yet showed signs of the new life rising within them.

A biting east wind was blowing across the country. But it was spring, and the sun was shining, and the sky was blue overhead.

Dorinda felt the spring in her heart, as, well wrapped up in velvet and furs, she walked up and down the sheltered terrace on the south side of the house—the home of her husband's people for several generations, and now her own. They had not gone up to London for the season, and though most of their neighbours, with the exception of the Duchess of Frampton, who was laid up by illness at her country seat a few miles from them, had left or were going to leave shortly for town, Dorinda did not regret her own absence from the great society world for which only a year before she had longed so eagerly. As she paced up and down the long stone terrace, her husband, gun in hand, came out of a door that opened on to it. He saw her before she saw him, and his brows puckered into a painful frown. As she heard his step, she turned her head, her face lighting up with that quick, sweet smile which gave it a beauty to those who cared to find it there.

"It's a jolly morning," he said; "but isn't it too cold for you to be out?"

He was always gentle to and careful of her.

"I'm tired of staying indoors," she said, with a faint touch of petulance. "I've been in the house three days."

It was a little dull, as he was out all day; but she had learned many things since her marriage, the love of her heart

supplying the place of worldly wisdom, and she never complained of his long absences.

"Regretting the London season already?" he said, with a careless amusement.

"No," she said, bravely, "I am very happy here."

She knew now that she was not to him what he was to her.

But though she had moments of intense depression and heart-sickness, she did not despair. One day, if she were patient and wise, it might be different. One day, if Heaven pleased, there would be tiny hands to draw their hearts closer together. In the meantime, with that wonderful wisdom born of her own love, and in which not even the most finished coquette could have instructed her better, she never bored him with too much of her presence, and never wearied him with too many of her caresses.

But alas for the wisdom and her heart!

Mrs. Thwaite had returned to England for a visit, and at this very moment was staying in the neighbourhood—at the Vicarage, the Vicar's wife being a cousin of hers.

Only the afternoon before, Underhill had been with her. By some coincidence, Dorinda and the other woman were wearing the same furs and the same tone of colour.

But Dorinda was not looking well this morning. The cold had pinched and chilled her, and as her husband looked at her, the rich tone of velvet and fur raised up a vision of that other woman, who had looked so daintily lovely in her winter toilette. He had never seen her look plain or dowdy. Every gesture was a delight, every act of womanly coquetting a revelation. He walked on by the side of his wife, his eyes dazed by the vision.

"I don't think the London season was quite as nice as I expected," said Dorinda.

The pretty voice, with its note of reflective self-analysis, roused him. He took the cigar out of his mouth, and as he knocked off the ashes he saw that he had bitten it almost through. He flung it from him with an unsaid curse, as if it had been a witness to his traitor thoughts, and looked down at his wife with a guilty remorse.

"How was that?" he asked. "I thought you seemed to like it remarkably well, considering that you had been brought up to believe that anything beyond a parochial tea-fight was a snare for the unwary. Do you know, I felt quite nervous at the

thought of being even indirectly responsible for taking you out of a Sunday-school and launching you in a London ball-room."

She laughed.

"I liked the London ball-rooms, and the dressing, and the driving, and the theatres, and the hundreds of other places we went to—in a way; but at the end of it all I came to the conclusion that it was disappointing. It was all laughing, and talking, and amusement, and yet no one seemed to care very much about anything; and then it was all so very much the same thing, and everybody seemed so much alike; and though we went to see pictures, and to hear music, and discussed the last new thing in books or discoveries, and, in fact, knew everything that was going on, we never seemed really within touch of what we saw, or heard, or discussed. It was all chatter, and nobody cared, except that they wished to talk and look like everybody else."

"And you, foolish little soul, imagined that people ever plunged into the depths when they could skim lightly and easily on the surface, and make quite as good an appearance! Better, because diving into the depths for pearls is not a becoming occupation; you come up exhausted, with dulled eyes and pale lips. It isn't worth the trouble when you can buy your pearls set and ready at second-hand. Why should you ruin your digestion and waste your strength trying to bring truth up from the bottom of the well, when you can chatter about it just as well on the top?"

"But it was you who taught me to believe that I should find realities in the new world you opened for me," she said, softly. "So I was a little disappointed when I found only the shadows."

"Child! Did anything I ever say bear half as much meaning to you?" he said, with bitter self-mockery. "You should not have taken me in earnest."

She shook her head.

"You taught me beautiful things that I never knew before, and it made me happy. And, after all, the realities are there, and we need not play with the shadows unless we wish; and, Myles, I know that in your heart you believe that the truth of all things is worth seeking for, though you and the Duchess laugh like the rest, and say, 'Life is too short to take the trouble.'"

"It is too late for me to begin now, anyway," he said, with a hard laugh;

"and if you are wise you will keep to the surface, too."

But Dorinda shook her wise little head.

"You will not always say that," she said. "For a day comes to all of us when we must face the real, and let the shadows go!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE following afternoon, Dorinda drove down to the Vicarage to call on the Vicar's wife.

Mrs. Grey was out; but the servant said that Mrs. Thwaite was in the garden with the children, and offered to go and find her. But Dorinda said she would look for her herself. Mrs. Thwaite was staying alone at the Vicarage while her husband was away on the Continent. He was to be absent for another month.

Dorinda walked through the garden without seeing or hearing any one. She met the gardener at last, who told her that they had gone into the wood that bordered the Vicarage grounds. She went on, and, reaching the little gate that led into the woods, she passed through it a few yards, then stopped suddenly. In the distance she heard the laughing voices of the children; but there were others closer to her. Between her and them was a great clump of thorn and furze. She could not see the speakers.

"Why did I marry her? Because I wanted her money. I did not love her—and you know it. I never loved, nor ever shall love any woman, but you—and you know it!"

"I wish you did love her, then! It would be better for you. It doesn't matter now to us."

It was Mrs. Thwaite's voice. It was full of tears and a miserable weak helplessness.

"Don't drive me mad. Do you think that there is any better for me? Can't you even imagine what it is to live on the bounty of a woman you have wronged? For it is that. It was her money that kept the old place over my head. It is her money that is saving me from ruin now. I feel it every hour of the day, knowing that I only love you. I am ashamed—ashamed down to the ground; and yet I still love only you."

Mrs. Thwaite laughed a hard, hysterical laugh.

"If my husband could hear you—he would shoot us both. He is terrible when

he is angry; and I am afraid—oh, so afraid of him when you speak like that. Suppose he had returned suddenly and heard!" with a shudder of dread.

"Why did you throw me over to marry him?" he said, mercilessly. "It was worse than murder!"

"Don't you know I couldn't help myself?" and she was crying again. "It was my father——"

The east wind of yesterday had changed to-day into the south-west. A fragrant, moist breeze swept up through the leafless trees, scattering a few rain-drops in Dorinda's face. It seemed to her as if the earth were suddenly full of tears. She turned sharply away, her feet falling unheard on the mossy turf, and hurried back through the gate into the Vicarage garden.

The children's voices were drawing nearer as they ran back through the woods to show Mrs. Thwaite the first primroses they had found.

In the west were piling up great banks of clouds, rent by a long rift, through which shone a line of orange fire, the leafless trees of the wood standing with their skeleton branches outlined against the lurid background.

The sunset of that spring day never quite passed from Dorinda's consciousness. It was to rise up before her in the mornings of the new days, and in the dead of dark nights for many years afterwards, though she prayed Heaven to take its recollection from her.

She went home to the house which had been saved by her money—for the salvation of which she had been wronged. She did not see her husband again that evening. She went straight to her room and shut herself in there, pleading a bad headache. She must have time to think it all out before she saw him.

He was dining out that night, and when he came in her maid told him that her mistress was asleep.

She had decided nothing when the next day came.

He left the house early to go to a distant meet, and was absent all day.

In the afternoon the Duchess, who was ill fitted to leave her house, came to see her. She knew of Mrs. Thwaite being at the Vicarage, and heard that Underhill was visiting there.

When she saw Dorinda she was shocked at her appearance, and uttered mentally some very hard things of that young man.

She wondered if Dorinda had learned

anything; but the girl gave no sign. Once only she seemed stirred out of the still calm of her manner. It was when the Duchess, partly to test her, mentioned Mr. Thwaite. She had heard herself that morning from a friend in Paris that he had just met the Australian millionaire. Mr. Thwaite was on his way back to England. He meant to give his wife a surprise, and had not written, intending to be with her in a few hours. He had finished his business on the Continent more quickly than he had expected, and did not care to linger for amusement without her.

"He is a model husband," said the Duchess, "though what he can see in that weak creature of a woman to merit such devotion I can't make out. But I believe he keeps her in order, and they say his jealousy is terrible. If he found his wife trifling with another man, he would kill them both. He is just the sort of man that woman needs to keep her in order."

Dorinda had paled a little as she spoke, but she sat listening with the same frozen calm which had possessed her since she had heard her husband talking in the sunset, in the Vicarage garden, with the woman he loved, and the Duchess went away satisfied that as yet she had heard none of the gossip which was beginning to be spread about her husband and Mrs. Thwaite.

"But I will have a talk to that young man," she said, grimly, to herself, as she drove home. And a thought came into her worldly mind which had not disturbed its cynical philosophy for many a long year, referring to "one of these little ones," and the ugly responsibility attached to the offending of them.

CHAPTER V.

By the evening Dorinda had arranged her plans.

Underhill always sat up long after the rest of the household had gone to rest. Dorinda waited till the house was quite quiet.

Then rising, and wrapping herself in her soft white dressing-gown, she left the room to go down to the library, where her husband always sat reading till the dawn.

It was between one and two, the hour when the sleep of the living world approaches most nearly to its twin brother—death. The house was as still, indeed, as if the shadow of Azrael lay already across its threshold. Only the noise of the mice as they scampered, and gnawed, and

destroyed behind the wainscoting, and the ticking of the great clock in the hall, broke its silence. But outside there raged a fierce south-westerly gale, which shrieked and screamed round the house, and drove in its fury torrents of rain against the shuttered windows, until rain and wind raised a roar and a tumult which made those safe under shelter think with fear and pity of others who were abroad in it on land or sea.

Yet Dorinda felt that it would be child's play to face that storm, if by so doing she could be spared this meeting with her husband. But she went on without flinching, with that set stillness on the white face.

She passed on through the dark house, the pale light of the candle she carried casting a kind of ghostly radiance about the white-clad figure, outlining it in luminous light against the darkness like that said to illumine the forms of the dead to the eyes of the living, when they come back again to revisit the scenes from which they have passed to the everlasting beyond, where earthly happiness as well as sorrow are unknown.

She reached the library, and knocked softly; there was no answer. She opened the door. The room was in darkness; there was no one there.

She stood for a second looking about it, then advanced slowly to the writing-table, at which her husband had been apparently writing. The chair stood there half pushed aside; there were some scattered papers. She had not seen him all day. He had sent to enquire after her in the morning before he went out; and when he had come home late in the evening he had told his valet that he had dined. Then he had gone straight to his own part of the house. She had divined that he had wished to avoid her. He, though he did not love her, had still felt the black presence of that shadow standing between them. As she reached the writing-table she saw lying on it a letter addressed to her. She set down the candle and took it up.

For a second she stood with it unopened, her brows contracting as with a stab of physical anguish. But she forced back the surging wave of dread and opened it. It was from Mrs. Thwaite to her husband. It was a mistake. He had torn up the one he had written to her, and put this letter in its place.

She read it.

"Yes; I will come to you to-night. I

will meet you where you appointed. I cannot endure this life any longer. We have a whole month before us to hide ourselves in! Surely we can hide ourselves from him somewhere on the face of this earth. Oh, I am in terror! Suppose he came back sooner—he would murder us both. Unless we can put seas between him and us, he will track us down. He would kill you before my eyes, and then I should be left to face him alone! You don't know what he is. But we shall be safe! You will save me from him! We will travel night and day! A whole month before us! And to-morrow we shall be out of England already—if we can catch the mail train as it passes through Allington. I will be at Red Spinney the time you said. It is going to be a fearful night; but I do not mind. If we lose another day I would not go with you. Suppose he came home sooner—but I will not think of that. To-night, at half-past two, in the old hut."

Dorinda read it through.

A whole month before them—but he was coming to-morrow! To-morrow, to shoot them both—the traitors, false to oaths and honour! A man who never forgave; who tracked down those he hated like a sleuth-hound; who would kill them—kill them—

She looked down at the letter again. Then the dead white stillness of her face flamed into fearful exultant passion, convulsing it into ugliness. He, the wronged husband, was coming to-morrow—to-morrow, to avenge himself and her!

She clenched her little hand as it rested on the table, and raised her face, convulsed with that dreadful fury and lust of vengeance, as if crying to Heaven to aid her and that coming avenger—she who till this moment had never looked up, save in innocent prayer and tender appeal for a blessing on others.

Yes; he would be in time. He should have the letter from her hands, and he would start on their track at once. She passed her hand over her eyes, as if a sudden mist of blood dimmed them, and laughed aloud. It was the sound of that ugly laugh which roused her from the horrible ecstasy of murder and revenge.

She stumbled back, clutching at the chair to save herself, and stood swaying giddily to and fro. Upon the confused faintness of mind and body stole a dull consciousness of some familiar presence—a suggestion of tenderness and gentleness; of the hallowed

intimacy of married life; of a voice which had never spoken a harsh word to her; of eyes which had always looked kindly at her.

Her husband had been smoking in the room. The scent of his cigars, which she knew so well, still lingered, awakening homely recollections of the prosaic details of every-day life, so dear to the heart of a woman and a wife—that beautiful commonplace, in which her heart-life beats out always the song of home.

He did not love her—this husband who loved another woman. Her whole being was still wrung with the agony of his treachery; but she began to think, as his familiar presence seemed to make itself felt about her, that she had loved him.

The horror of that other man's speedy coming fell on her. He would murder Myles, her husband, who, till he had done her this great unpardonable wrong, had been good to her, though he had not loved her.

The great clock in the hall struck out the half-hour, half-past one—and they were to meet at half-past two in the woodman's hut in Red Spinney, to make their way from there to that distant country town station, where they would catch the early mail train to Liverpool. She seemed suddenly able to take in all the details of their guilty flight.

Mrs. Thwaite was not at the Vicarage to-night, she had gone in the morning to spend a few days at a country seat some miles away. Red Spinney was near her friend's house. But how was her husband to be warned—to be saved? He had probably started already. Could she possibly herself reach Red Spinney and stop them before they went any farther? Could she get there in time—through such a night? She could ask no one to help her; their flight must be kept secret, or that dreadful avenger would wipe out with his blood the wrong the other man had done him. She must find her husband before he left Red Spinney, to tell him that Mr. Thwaite would be home to-morrow. To-day! It was to-day. Could she reach her husband in time?

She had no consciousness of anything else now.

Ten minutes later, having satisfied herself that her husband had really left the house, half-clad in her eager haste to go to him, she left the house and passed out into the raging night.

How she did that terrible journey no one ever knew. Through the blackness of

the night, through the fury of the storm of wind and rain; over the rough country roads, drenched, chilled to the bone; bruised and wounded as she stumbled again and again in the darkness; half fainting with exhaustion and effort, growing every moment more dazed; with the wild force of the elements about her, yet always possessed by that one thought which guided her—when will and power seemed to have failed her—to save her husband from the man who would track him down to the ends of the earth, to avenge his wrong, she went on and on. Until she fell almost close to its threshold, she did not even know that she had reached the hut on the edge of the spinney.

Then, as she stumbled to her feet again, she caught sight of a glimmer of light, as the door opened a little and some one looked out into the storm-filled night. It closed again, and she staggered forward, the jingle of harness and the sound of a restless horse coming from a ruined out-house close to the hut, guiding her. She heard the low murmur of voices inside. She struck at the door with both hands, and called her husband's name.

There was a dead pause in the low-voiced talk. Then came a woman's faint scream of wild terror, for the call had sounded out of the wild darkness of the night, like a spirit crying from the place of the dead. She opened the door and saw them.

Mrs. Thwaite sat on a rough bench, leaning against the wall of the cabin, the yellow flare of a lantern lighting up her face, ghastly and wide-eyed with terror. She had been crying when Dorinda had knocked, but the tears seemed suddenly frozen in her eyes, and she crouched back against the wall, half mad with terror.

Myles Underhill stood like one turned to stone, staring at his wife in a horror of recognition. It was that scene seared into her brain that haunted Dorinda through all the delirium of the black days that followed.

"Her husband is coming home to-day," she said, in a hoarse, strained voice, which did not reach her own ears, dulled by the deadly faintness that was overcoming her, and pointing at Mrs. Thwaite. "I came to save you! Take her back, or he will kill you both!"

She reeled and fell senseless to the ground.

Of the days and weeks that followed, she herself had no count. She lay on the border-

land of life and death, and knew nothing except the haunting horror of that ever-present scene in the hut of Red Spinney.

Her child was born, and died within a few moments of its birth.

That she herself could live seemed an impossibility. She knew nothing of the tender care that surrounded her, nor of the presence of the Duchess, who scarcely left her bedside, and who would never speak to the young man, who went about like a ghost in his own house, starting at every voice lest it should bring tidings of the death of the wife he had not loved.

She knew nothing of his presence there; nothing of the success of her effort to save them. She did not know that the woman whom she had saved from deadly sin had passed safely back into the care of her husband, a better woman than she had ever been before, because of the terrible sacrifice which had wrought her salvation. For fear and remorse combined had made her part from Underhill that night. She did not know of any of the chatter and gossip that was circulated in the neighbourhood about her own strange midnight adventure, though the real truth of the case had been hushed up, and never came out. She did not even know how she had been brought back by her husband that dreadful night to the house, nor even if he were sorry or angry.

But she lived.

She came back slowly, so slowly that for months they did not dare say that she was out of danger.

It was not for many days after her recovery that she was allowed to hear everything, and to decide what her future course of action was to be.

But she had made up her mind, and as soon as she was able to be moved, she said she would go back to the home of her girlhood in Derbyshire. They did not thwart her, and she left her husband's house.

"Do you think she will ever come back to you, Myles Underhill?" asked the Duchess. "I wonder if you will find your house as empty as mine was when she left it for yours."

"It is very empty and desolate," said the young man. "And it is haunted by her eyes as I saw them that night. And I seem always to hear the sound of dead children's feet. I shall shut up the house and go away. I do not think she will ever come back."

"Your only hope is in the goodness we laughed at—Heaven forgive us both!" said

the Duchess, and there were tears in the eyes which had grown soft with womanly tenderness once more as she nursed the girl who was neither pretty, nor smart, nor worldly wise. "Perhaps when the daffodils come up again, and the earth lives anew, and the dreary things are forgotten, she may come back into your life, too. Go to her in the spring-time, for she is a good woman."

A LAPSE OF MEMORY.

By T. W. SPEIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

ON a certain pleasant spring afternoon, Dr. Ainslie and his son Oswald drove up to Nunwood railway station, and alighted from the former's gig. They had some minutes to spare before the train was due, so, after the younger man had taken his ticket, the father linked his arm in that of his son, and the two began to pace the platform together.

Oswald Ainslie was a good-looking, frank-eyed young fellow, with a budding silky moustache, of which he was secretly very proud. At this time he was exactly twenty-one years and three months old. He was well, even fashionably dressed; but for all that, there was an indefinable air of rusticity about him—a suspicion of provincialism in his manner and bearing, which would announce him at the first glance to be a specimen of that singular compound of shrewdness and simplicity, "a young man from the country." He was bound for London, on his annual visit to his godmother, Lady Pym.

"And I do hope that before you come back," said Dr. Ainslie, "her ladyship will have come to some definite arrangement with regard to your future. It's a matter which ought to have been settled long ago; yet month passes after month, till now you are turned twenty-one, and all her ladyship keeps on saying is, 'Wait.' Meanwhile you are simply idling away your life. At your age I was working fourteen hours a day, and keeping myself, without a farthing of help from anybody. That's what I call the proper kind of spirit for a young fellow to cultivate."

Oswald laughed a little uneasily.

"Well, sir, I think it can scarcely be put down as my fault that I am as I am," he said. "My godmother has always led

us to understand that my future should be her special care, and I don't for one moment suppose that she is going to break faith with me."

"That may be very well, Oswald, as far as it goes; but, as I said before, while we are awaiting her ladyship's pleasure, you are frittering your life away. I sometimes wish her ladyship had been at Jericho before she offered to stand sponsor for you."

His father's views on the matter by no means commended themselves to Master Oswald; but, much to his relief, the train came steaming up at this juncture, and there was no time to say more. Dr. Ainslie saw his son safely bestowed in a second-class carriage.

"Don't neglect to write to your mother at least twice a week," he said, as he shook hands with the boy. "You know how anxious she is when any of her fledglings are out of her sight."

"He calls me a 'fledgling,' and I am turned twenty-one!" murmured Oswald, as the wheels of the carriage began to revolve.

Three minutes later the Doctor climbed into his gig with a little sigh, and set off at a jog-trot pace on his round of afternoon visits.

Meanwhile our hero was speeding southward with all that happy indifference to what the future might have in store for him which only youth, health, and high spirits have the power to confer. As it happened, he was the only occupant of the compartment—a fact for which he was duly grateful. Hardly was Nunwood left a mile behind before he drew an envelope from his pocket, and with thumb and finger deftly extracted therefrom a tiny ringlet of golden hair, which, with a lover's infatuation, he pressed to his lips again and again. Pretty Ellen Trent, the Curate's daughter, had given it him no longer ago than yesterday, and, in return, he had promised that he would have it enclosed in a locket and wear it near his heart as long as he lived. He had loved Ellen in secret for six months—which, to the young fellow, seemed like half a lifetime—and yesterday, the Fates being propitious, he had plucked up heart of grace to tell her so. For the present the affair was to be kept a profound secret. Ellen was one of a large family who were being brought up on a slender stipend, and would bring no dowry to her husband; but Oswald did not care a fig for that. It should be in the power of no one to

accuse him of having contracted a mercenary union.

Lady Pym had always promised her godson that when he should come of age she would make him a little present in honour of the event; but when, on the morning of his twenty-first birthday, he received a briefly worded note from her, informing him that the sum of two thousand pounds had been transferred from her banking account to his name, and when the same post brought him an official letter from the bankers, confirming the news, and enclosing a blank cheque-book for his use, and asking for a specimen of his signature, her ladyship's unexpected munificence almost took away the breath both of his father and himself, so much was it in excess of anything they had looked forward to.

Oswald was not long before he experienced that delicious moment which can come but once in a lifetime, when a man draws his first cheque, knowing at the same time that it will be duly honoured. He was in no absolute want of money, and his father had strongly advised him on no account to break into his capital, but such advice by no means coincided with his own generous instincts. His godmother's gift was not more than a week old before he drew a cheque for a hundred pounds, out of which he bought a new watch and chain for his father, a brooch and earrings for his mother, and a locket for each of his sisters. Then there was a rather expensive ring—a cat's-eye set with brilliants—which he had long admired. This he now ventured to purchase for himself, only he took care never to wear it at home, and his eldest sister was the only person taken into his confidence in the affair. After that, he cleared off his tailor's and one or two other personal accounts, and treated himself to what he termed "a thorough rig-out." When that was done, he promised himself that he would draw no more cheques for some time to come.

Nunwood, although ranking itself as a place of no small importance, is on a branch line of railway at a point a dozen miles away from its junction with the nearest main line to the metropolis. When Oswald Ainslie took his second-class ticket at Nunwood station, his father was naturally under the impression that he had booked through to London; but such was not the case. Master Oswald booked second-class to Millfield only, at which place he would have to change trains, and from whence he

intended to book first-class to London, and enjoy a smoke by the way. Why should Lady Pym's godson, a man with a balance at his bankers', travel second-class? Oswald saw no reason in the world why he should do so.

CHAPTER II.

THE programme he had laid down for himself was duly carried into effect. He saw his portmanteau transferred to the London train, and then, having obtained a first-class ticket, he found an empty smoking compartment and prepared to make himself comfortable for the rest of the journey. But at the last moment, after the engine had given a preliminary throb, the door was suddenly flung open by one of the officials, and a middle-aged gentleman in a fur-trimmed overcoat stepped into the carriage as quietly and deliberately as though he had still a quarter of an hour to spare.

"When a delay of a couple of seconds is enough to cause one to lose one's train, one scarcely knows whether one ought to bless or ban English punctuality." He spoke smilingly, addressing himself directly to Ainslie, while in the act of arranging his travelling rug across his knees. "On the Continent, now," he went on, "there is often a charming uncertainty with regard to the time at which your train will start. You know when it ought to start, but that appears to have little to do with the matter. I am told there are people who regard such minor troubles as merely enhancing the piquancy of travel. What is your opinion, sir?"

"I have never yet been on the Continent. I have never been out of England," answered Oswald, with a blush at having to make such a confession.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the stranger. "Then allow me to tell you that you have in store one of the few real pleasures which existence in the nineteenth century can offer a man. Never to have set foot in France or Switzerland or Italy! All those delights still in the future! I envy you, young sir—I envy you."

He had removed his hat by this time, and had assumed in its place a tasselled crimson silk skull-cap. He next produced a silver-mounted cigar-case, and having selected a cigar with the air of a man engaged in an important function, he proceeded to light it. Oswald was already smoking.

The stranger was a tall, thin man of from fifty to fifty-five years of age. His close-cropped, stubby hair was plentifully streaked with grey, but his eyebrows, together with his moustache and short, pointed beard, were of a black so intense as somehow to give Oswald the impression that they had been dyed. He had a sallow complexion, and a long, thin, aquiline nose, with finely curved nostrils, but the expression of his mouth was hidden by his moustache. He had large, dark, very luminous eyes, deep set under penthouse brows, with tiny flecks of tawny light in them such as Oswald had never seen in the eyes of any one else. His hands were long and thin, and his nails were pared to an almost claw-like point.

The stranger spoke English with remarkable fluency and purity, but with an unmistakable foreign accent.

The two men smoked for a little while in silence, Ainslie being too shy to venture any observations on his own account. At length the stranger said :

"Pardon me for venturing to ask whether the cigar you are smoking is of a foreign brand?"

"The man from whom I bought the box assured me that they were foreign," answered Oswald, with a blush. How he hated himself for not being able to answer such a simple question without colouring up!

"I think that very possible," answered the other, drily. "What rogues many of those cigar dealers are! How they impose upon any one whom they have reason to think at all inexperienced! But I notice that your weed is nearly done. Will you oblige me by trying one of mine?"

He held out his case as he spoke, and Oswald, flinging away the stump of the cigar he had been smoking, took the first that came to his hand of those proffered him. He thanked the stranger with a smile and a little bow, but at the same time he wished most heartily that he had bestowed himself in another compartment.

"How does the cigar suit you? Is the flavour to your liking?" asked his travelling companion presently, emitting a long spiral of smoke from his lips as he did so.

Oswald was fain to admit what was no more than the truth, that never before had he smoked a cigar its equal either in flavour or aroma. It was milder than the one he had been smoking, or so it seemed to him, and yet there was a seductiveness about it which made him feel as if he had never known the true luxury of smoking till now.

But presently he became conscious of a peculiar sensation in his head. It was a sense of lightness, of buoyancy; it was as though his brain were being gradually inflated with some subtle gas, the effect of which was at once stimulating and agreeable. Oswald, in fact, felt somewhat as he might have felt had he drunk a couple of glasses of champagne quickly one after the other. The experience, strange though it was, was by no means an unpleasant one.

"I presume that, like myself, you are bound for London?" said his companion, after a time.

Oswald intimated that London was his destination.

"Ah, a grand place, London!" was the reply. "For my part, I prefer it either to Paris, or Berlin, or St. Petersburg; and I think that, without flattery, I may say I am intimately acquainted with all three. Do you purpose making much of a stay there, may I ask? But, perhaps London is your home?"

"My home is at Nunwood," answered Oswald, who, owing either to the influence of the cigar, or something else, began to feel in a talkative mood, and to be conscious that his shyness was leaving him. "I am going to town on a visit to my godmother, Lady Pym."

He blushed again as he mentioned her ladyship's name. It was only a bit of boyish brag, of which he was half ashamed, that had caused him to speak of her at all.

"Lady Pym," said the other, musingly; "I seem to know the name, and yet I cannot call to mind that I have ever had the honour of being introduced to her ladyship."

A quarter of an hour's chat about nothing in especial followed, and then the stranger said :

"You have smoked that cigar quite far enough; permit me to offer you another. I can see that you appreciate them, which is a proof that your palate has not yet been vitiated. You are at a happy age, sir—a happy age."

Oswald would fain have refused the second cigar, or, at least, have put it away to smoke at another time, but he was too shy to do so. He had a presentiment that for the present he had smoked quite as much as was good for him. But next moment he called to mind that he was now twenty-one years and three months old, and that, consequently, he ought to be able to do as other men did. He took another cigar and proceeded to light it.

When, subsequently, he endeavoured to go over in memory all that had passed between himself and his fellow-traveller, he found that he retained but a very vague and confused recollection of anything that was said or done by him after he had lighted that fatal second cigar. He felt nearly sure that he had so far given way to the talkative mood which had so strangely overcome him, as to tell his companion all there was to tell about himself and his affairs, even to the extent of revealing that he had eighteen hundred and seventy-five pounds standing to his credit in one of the London banks. His new-found acquaintance, as it seemed to him, had listened to his story with the most courteous attention, even going so far, now and again, as to interpolate an apropos question or two, which was really very nice on the part of a man more than double his age; although, on the other hand, he had failed to reciprocate the confidence and had told Oswald nothing, absolutely nothing, personal to himself. Still, Oswald failed to recall anything very clearly till he found himself standing on the platform of the London terminus, with his portmanteau at his feet and a visiting card in his hand, on which were engraved the words, "Captain Demetrius," with the address written in minute characters below: "No. 5A, Mintern Place, W.C."

The card had been pressed upon him at parting, and, at the same time, a promise had been extracted from him that on the next day but one he would call on Captain Demetrius and his daughter. "Yes, he certainly said, 'on me and my daughter,'" murmured Oswald as a hansom drew up in front of him.

CHAPTER III.

LADY PYM, most of whose time was spent abroad, had no town house, but when she found herself in London always took up her quarters at that old-established and most respectable of hotels known as "Mumble's," to which place Oswald now betook himself in his cab. He had been there before, and the head waiter did not fail to recognise him. "Her ladyship, who ordered her rooms three days since, has not yet arrived," said the man; "but here's a telegram for you, sir, which came a couple of hours ago."

The message, which was from Paris, was to the effect that her ladyship was laid up with a bad cold, and had decided not to

risk the journey till she was somewhat better. Meanwhile, Oswald was to stay on at Mumble's, pending her arrival. The request thus conveyed was one which Oswald was by no means disinclined to carry into effect. To be young and in good health to have ample funds at command should you choose to draw upon them, and, moreover, to find yourself established at free quarters in one of the most comfortable hotels in town—what more could any reasonable mortal desire? Oswald desired nothing more, but wisely determined to enjoy himself while the opportunity was his, knowing from experience that when her ladyship should arrive she would keep him pretty closely tied to her apron-string, and that all his pleasant little bachelor treats—harmless though they were—must then perforce be put a stop to.

Thus it came to pass that Oswald now spent the pleasantest three days he had ever spent in London, in the course of which, however, he found time to write a long letter to his darling Nellie, under cover to a young married friend of hers, who was the confidant of their love secret. On the evening of the third day a second telegram reached the young man. Her ladyship was better, but not yet well enough to travel. Meanwhile her godson was to stay on where he was.

On the morning of the fourth day Oswald took up Captain Demetrius's card and regarded it with an air of doubt. He had promised to call at Mintern Place on the second day after his arrival, but some feeling had hitherto held him back, into the origin of which he did not care to enquire too closely. It may have been a consciousness that, to a certain extent, he had made an ass of himself during his journey up to town which now filled him with a sort of shamefacedness at the thought of meeting the Captain again. But he had given his promise to call, and, although he had delayed carrying it into effect, he had not the slightest intention of breaking it.

"I'll call upon him this very afternoon," he said, presently, with an air of resolution. "A man of the world such as he is will know how to make some allowance for an ignorant yokel like me."

No. 5A, Mintern Place, was let out in different suites of apartments; Captain Demetrius and his daughter being, just then, the occupants of the drawing-room floor. Ainslie sent up his card by the page, and half a minute later was re-

quested to walk upstairs. The Captain in person, in a purple velvet dressing-gown, and wearing his crimson silk skull-cap, met him at the door and shook him by the hand with much cordiality.

"My dear Mr. Ainslie, I am delighted to see you," he said. "I was beginning to think that you had either forgotten or regretted your promise. That you have not forgotten it your presence here is proof sufficient, and I will try to flatter myself that you have not regretted it."

By this he had led Oswald into the room, which was well, if somewhat garishly furnished. Putting his hands on the young man's shoulders, with smiling insistence he pressed him down into a capacious, softly cushioned chair fronting the window. Although the spring was well advanced, the day was chilly, and a blazing fire in the grate added an element of comfort to the room. Two or three large bowls filled with flowers, several of which were altogether strange to Oswald, stood about and exhaled a sweet but pungent perfume. Before many minutes had passed Ainslie found himself chatting with his host on a pleasantly easy and almost confidential footing. Evidently the Captain had a gift for putting others at their ease, and was himself so seemingly open and unreserved, that it would have needed a far more suspicious disposition than Oswald could lay claim to, not to have responded in a somewhat similar strain. Thus, in the course of the first quarter of an hour, the Captain had heard all about Lady Pym's illness, and her non-arrival in town; he had also been told—which might, perhaps, be a matter of minor interest to him—to which theatres and other places of amusement Oswald had found his way since they two had parted at the terminus.

Scarcely had Oswald sunk into his easy-chair before Demetrius said to him:

"Myrrha will be here presently."

The young man had taken the remark as applying to the Captain's daughter, and had felt no particular interest in the announcement—for was not his heart bound up in his darling Nellie? But when, after a time, the door opened, and Miss Demetrius paused for a moment on the threshold, Oswald felt that never before had his eyes taken in such a vision of loveliness.

In figure Myrrha Demetrius was tall and slender, but with nothing of fragility in her appearance. Her complexion was of the purest and most transparent olive, her silky

hair and sharply pencilled eyebrows were as ebony as a raven's wing. But in her eyes lay her greatest attraction. They were large, liquid, melting, and as dark as midnight, and, like midnight, pricked with points of ardent flame, which thrilled the young man through and through. No wonder that when his mind, as it presently did, reverted for a moment to the image of Nellie Trent, it was only a dim and faded picture of the fair-haired, blue-eyed girl who had nestled so warmly in his thoughts that now flitted across his mental retina. All in a moment a new and gorgeous planet had swum into his ken, and for the time being poor Nellie's wistful eyes and shadowy smile were eclipsed.

Ainslie was conscious of being introduced to Miss Demetrius, and of floundering through the ordeal somehow. Then the girl vanished, to reappear a couple of minutes later when she had taken off her outdoor things.

Presently Demetrius asked his daughter to favour them with a little music. By this time both the men were smoking. Myrrha and shyness were unacquainted. She seated herself at the piano and began to play, and so went on playing one piece after another with only half a minute's pause between each. Oswald sat enraptured and entranced. Never before had music appealed to him as this girl's playing did. He was as one buoyed up and borne aloft on a wave of sensuous emotion; who, minute by minute, is conscious that he is drifting further away from the humdrum, prosaic life, which is all he has hitherto known, towards a land of delicious dreams and infinite sweet possibilities.

He was recalled with a start by Demetrius saying to him:

"We have not yet taken, Myrrha and I, to the English fashion of five o'clock tea; but at this time of day, when I happen to be indoors, I certainly enjoy a cup of coffee with my cigar. What say you, Mr. Ainslie—will you indulge in one with me? As it happens, Madame Chevin, my worthy locataire, has the secret of making it to perfection."

Ten minutes later black coffee was brought in, and Demetrius proceeded to pour out a cup for Ainslie and another for himself. Oswald, who had never tasted the "stuff" before, followed his host's example in sipping it with apparent gusto between the whiffs of his cigar. Still the music went on with but brief

intermissions, Myrrha's repertory being, apparently, inexhaustible.

By this time the evening was drawing on. Already the room was in semi-darkness. The fire had burnt itself down to a deep red glow, which included the two men within its radius. Presently the Captain filled the cups afresh, and then, crossing to a cabinet, he produced from it a small decanter half filled with a ruby-coloured liqueur.

"Here is something that goes specially well with coffee, at least to my thinking," he said. "I am going to try a little of it, and I advise you to do the same."

Speaking thus, he poured a small quantity of the liqueur into his own cup, and, assuming Oswald's consent, a like quantity into his. Then the smoking and sipping went on as before, and still Myrrha's magic strains, now weird, now tender, now infused with a pathos which caused Oswald's eyes to dim with tears, and anon rising to a pitch of sublimated passion, awoke echoes as varied as themselves in the young man's breast, and seemed to attune his soul to finer imaginings than any it had ever known before.

Was it the music; was it the cosy warmth and perfumed twilight of the room; was it the tintured sweetness of the coffee, a mixture unlike anything within his experience; or was it the whole combined which presently caused Oswald to become conscious that a vague, delicious drowsiness was beginning to steal through his veins and mount to his brain? It was a question he cared neither to ask nor answer—neither that nor any other question. Of course he was not going to sleep; the mere thought of such a thing was absurd. He was pleasantly drowsy—nothing more—and after indulging in the sensation a few minutes longer, he would shake it off and become himself again.

He was not smoking now; his right hand, the fingers still holding his half-burnt cigar, was resting on the arm of his chair, and really he felt too lazy to lift the weed to his lips. After a little while his gaze, idly wandering and seeking no object in especial, seemed drawn, without any conscious volition on his part, to the face of his host, who sat fronting him on the opposite side of the hearth—not, however, to the face generally, but only to the eyes, which gave him back stare for stare and so fixed his regard that he had no power to withdraw it or turn it elsewhere. He was dimly aware that the drowsiness

was growing upon him, wrapping him round like a garment of softest wool, and in the same vague way he felt wholly powerless to break through its insidious influence.

From the dark orbs of Demetrius, from under the gloom of his penthouse brows, were emitted two palpitating rays of light which penetrated Oswald's brain by way of his eyes and held him captive. Then presently it seemed to him as if the head of the man opposite became transformed into the head of a hooded snake, which, with slow undulatory movements, alternately dilated its capello and contracted it, but never for an instant changed the direction of its baleful gaze.

Then there came over him a sort of far-away consciousness that the music had ceased, and that a fine current of ice-cold air was being directed full on the crown of his head, which sent an involuntary shudder down his spine. A few seconds more and all his faculties faded into unconsciousness.

Ainslie opened his eyes and came to himself with a start. He sat up in his chair, shivered, and stared around. Myrrha was playing a dreamy waltz in a minor key, while her father, with a freshly lighted cigar between his fingers, was staring fixedly into the fire. The evening had grown somewhat darker, but the gas had not yet been lighted. Oswald glanced at the clock; the time was twenty-five minutes past seven. He had been asleep exactly half an hour. The moment he realised this fact he felt himself become one huge blush from head to foot. What must Captain Demetrius think of him? Above all, what must Myrrha think of him? As this question put itself, he involuntarily started to his feet.

A moment later the music ceased abruptly, and Demetrius also rose to his feet. Ainslie stammered out something about having overstayed his time and having an appointment, and so forth; but he could never afterwards recall in what terms he did it.

"My dear Mr. Ainslie," said the Captain, "if you had only called upon me yesterday or the day before, I should certainly have done my best to induce you to stay and dine with us. To-day, however, as it happens, we have an engagement to dine out. But you must come to us on Sunday next without fail, when we will have a quiet little dinner by ourselves. Mr. Ainslie must hold himself disengaged for Sunday, must he not, Myrrha?"

"Oh, I do hope he will," responded Myrrha in her clear, bell-like tones, as she came forward. "Indeed, Mr. Ainslie, we shall not let you go till we have your promise." Then, a moment later, she said, "Permit me;" and with that she fixed an orchid in his button-hole, which she had taken from one of the bowls. As she did so, her eyes met his with a depth of intensity in them which might well have intoxicated the brain of a far more seasoned man of the world than Oswald could boast of being.

Five minutes later he was on his way to Mumble's in a hansom. His head ached, his eyes pricked, and without feeling cold he shivered.

"What is the matter with me?" he asked. "What was it that so unaccountably overcame me? Never did anything of the kind happen to me before. And to think that I allowed myself to go to sleep, though they were too well-bred even to allude to it! Oh, I could knock my stupid head against a lamp-post!" And once more he turned hot from crown to toe.

Having discharged his cab, he made his way to the coffee-room, where he found no one save Tony Cummins, a young man of his own age, with whom he had struck up an acquaintance since his arrival in town.

"You're a pretty sort, you are," began Cummins, "after promising a fellow his revenge at billiards, never to show up. I waited for you till past eleven, and then went off to bed in disgust."

Oswald stared at him as doubtful of his sanity.

"My dear fellow, what do you mean?" he demanded. "I won five games out of seven last night, and promised you your revenge to-night. Well, I'm quite ready to carry out my promise, though I feel anything but up to my usual mark."

It was now the other's turn to stare.

"Oh, come," he said, in a bantering tone, "none of your larks, old man. It was on Thursday you gave me my drubbing, worse luck; and it was last night I was to have had my revenge—not to-night, Saturday."

"Saturday—to-day Saturday!" exclaimed Oswald, in a faint voice, as he sank into a chair.

"Why, of course it's Saturday," said Cummins, with a dash of contempt in his voice, "and here's to-day's 'Times' to prove it."

At this juncture the waiter entered the room.

"Bax, what day of the week is to-day?" demanded Oswald.

His brain was in a whirl, strange lights danced before his eyes, his limbs felt as heavy as lead.

"Saturday, sir," answered Bax, promptly, with a slight lifting of his eyebrows.

"Then where did I sleep last night?" asked Oswald, putting the question to himself rather than to either of the others.

Bax, however, was ready with an answer.

"You didn't sleep here, sir," he said, with the ghost of a smile flickering round his mouth. "After leaving here with the other gentleman you brought with you in a cab about nine o'clock yesterday evening, we saw nothing more of you last night. In point of fact, sir," added Bax, confidentially, "we saw nothing more of you till you came in just now."

Oswald gazed at him open-mouthed.

"The gentleman I brought with me in a cab about nine o'clock yesterday evening!" he gasped. "I—I don't remember—that is to say, I don't understand."

"Yes, sir, a gent with a black, pointed beard and a hooked nose. You druv up together in a hansom. You took the gentleman upstairs to your own room, sir, and after staying there for a matter of ten minutes, you druv away together, and that's the last time any of us set eyes on you till you came in a few minutes since."

Oswald's bewilderment culminated with Bax's last words. He was like a man floundering in a morass, who only sinks the deeper the more he struggles to extricate himself. To attempt to analyse the strange confluence of emotions to which he was just then a prey would be labour in vain. A few minutes later he said:

"Cummins, old man, I feel awfully queer. Just give me an arm upstairs, will you?"

As soon as they reached his room, Oswald produced a key.

"I wish you would open my portmantau," he said, "and bring me the cheque-book you will find somewhere inside it." A horrible suspicion had dawned upon his mind.

Cummins found the cheque-book and handed it to Oswald. The latter, to his knowledge, had depleted his legacy by the amount of two cheques only, the first of them being for a hundred pounds, and the second for twenty-five pounds. His fingers shook a little as he took the book. Three seconds later found his worst fears con-

firmed. A third cheque was now missing from the book, on the counterfoil of which, in his own writing, these words stared him in the face: "Self or bearer, one thousand five hundred pounds."

Within ten minutes of the opening of the doors of Wimple and Croode's Bank on the Monday morning following the events herein narrated, Ainslie, accompanied by Cummins, presented himself at the counter. Handing his card to one of the cashiers, he said:

"Can you inform me whether any cheque bearing my signature was cashed by you on Saturday last?"

Oswald's card having been taken to a second official, the latter beckoned him to another part of the bank.

"You are Mr. Ainslie?" he asked.

Oswald nodded.

"That being the case, sir, your question strikes me as a somewhat singular one, seeing that on Saturday you came here in person and presented a cheque, signed by yourself, for one thousand five hundred pounds, which was duly honoured by us."

"Was I alone when I cashed the cheque in question? You will, I am sure, pardon me when I tell you that just now I am suffering from a sudden and most unfortunate lapse of memory."

The cashier bowed.

"No, sir, you were not alone; you were accompanied by a gentleman much older than yourself—a person with a black beard and moustache and a prominent nose. Not knowing you personally, Mr. Ainslie, and the cheque being made out to 'self or bearer'—a somewhat unusual thing in the case of so large an amount—we took the precaution of asking you to favour us with another specimen of your signature as a proof of identity. After that, of course, we had no option but to cash your cheque."

"How did I take it?"

"You took five hundred pounds in gold, sir, and the rest in notes of ten and twenty pounds each."

What Oswald learnt at the bank was no more than he had expected to be told. He had had the whole of Sunday during which to draw his conclusions from what he knew or guessed already.

From the bank he and Cummins drove to Mintern Place, only to find that the Captain and his daughter had taken their departure between eight and nine o'clock on Saturday evening, after having given previous notice of their intention to do so.

As to whither they had taken themselves, nobody at No. 5A professed to have the remotest notion. To Oswald it now seemed that there was nothing left him to do save to go back to his hotel and digest his loss with whatever amount of philosophy he could summon to his aid. Even if he could have succeeded in following up Demetrius, what then? There was no legal proof that the money had ever passed into his keeping, although the moral proof might seem without flaw; and granting that the bank-notes could have been traced to him, and an action brought against him for fraudulent possession, or whatever the proper legal term might be, what jury would convict a man on the strength of the preposterous story on which, and on which alone, Ainslie would have to rely? No; as Cummins pithily put the matter, he must just "grin and bear it."

It was perfectly clear to him now that while in the semi-somnolent condition induced by the drugged coffee he had been thrown into a hypnotic trance, and that all which had happened to him between seven o'clock on Friday evening and the same hour on Saturday had occurred while he was in that state. Only a little while before he had read a work by MM. Benet and Férét, the French savants, whose record of hypnotic experiments conducted by themselves and others contained matter far more surprising and unaccountable than anything that had happened to himself.

But there was a worse blow in store for Ainslie than the loss of his fifteen hundred pounds. A few days later came the news of Lady Pym's death. She had died, too, without a will, owing to which act of remissness on her part all her godson's hopes and expectations were scattered to the winds. It was a sadder and, let us hope, a wiser Oswald Ainslie that presently journeyed down to Nunwood than the jubilant youth who had travelled up to town such a little while before.

Yet it may well be that, in the long run, both the loss of his money and the shattering of his expectations proved far more of a benefit to him than the reverse, for he now set himself seriously to earn his own living, which, had all gone well with him, he almost certainly would not have done, and by that very act his character gained the ballast and steadiness in which it had been lacking before. To him the world was no longer a playground, but a place

for earnest work and unceasing endeavour, and to have that truth thoroughly brought home to him was fully worth the price he had paid for it. Not till five years had gone by did he find himself in a position to marry, but in Ellen Trent he gained a wife well worth waiting for.

A SPRING FLOWER.

By HARRIET STOCKALL.

SHE holds a snow-drop in her hand,
And on her childish breast
A newly-opened crocus lies,
The sunshine of life's April skies
Glints in the azure of her eyes.
First blossom blown in love's dear land,
First nestling in love's nest.

She came to us in happy hour,
When love's fresh spring-time smiled,
Flowers carpeted the way we trod,
Life blossomed forth like Aaron's rod ;
She came to us, a gift from God,
Our snow-drop white, our crocus flower,
Our blessed little child.

We watch her standing on the grass,
The green grass, daisy-starred ;
Her simple duties, one by one,
Her daily morning tasks are done,
And she skips gaily in the sun.

We sigh to think her spring must pass,
We sigh—it seemeth hard.

She is so tender, like a flower,
The first shy flower of spring ;
She is so joyous, like the thrush
That sings from yonder hawthorn-bush,
Her carol breaks the noontide hush ;
She is so gentle, like the shower
On April's blossoming.

She is so playful, like the fleet
White lambs that skip the mead ;
She is so trustful, like a dove
She comes and coos to us for love,
For love and kisses. God above !
Guard thou our child. We are not meet,
Though love be strong indeed.

Her spring must pass, as passeth by
Earth's spring ; and fuller dower
Of love and gladness, wealth and praise,
May wait her in life's summer ways ;
But till the ending of our days,
Close—closest—to our hearts must lie
Our little spring-time flower !

AN UNEXPECTED BLOW.

By ESMÉ STUART.

Author of "Kestell of Greytone," "By Right of Succession," etc. etc.

CHAPTER I.

I SHALL never forget the first day of our "altered circumstances," as my brother George calls it. My sister Nelly and myself had been to our first ball the evening before, and when we came home at two o'clock in the morning we retired to bed with the firm determination of getting up

very late. Nelly had a nervous dread of robbers, so we kept the door between our two rooms wide open.

I had not—or so it seemed to me—been asleep very long when I was roused by the opening and shutting of doors. Was it Nelly's robber ? But at the same moment my sister's voice called out :

"Oh, Dora, it can't be time to get up. Why are you moving about ?"

"I thought you were waking me. Do let's go to sleep again." And we did.

When I next opened my eyes it was ten o'clock, and Nelly was standing ready dressed by my bedside.

"Dora, dear, make haste and get up. I have been downstairs, and everything seems so strange."

"We are late, of course," I replied, jumping out of bed, and feeling very cross. "Father has gone to a vestry meeting or is somewhere in the parish, and George is out riding, and mother is ordering lunch, and Tom is in mischief."

"But mother's great trunk is in her room, half packed."

Nelly looked strangely puzzled.

"Then most likely she has had a letter from Aunt Mellish," I said, still crossly. "She has made mother go to five death-beds already."

I rang the bell for Kelly, our maid, but no maid appeared, and I had to twist my hair up as best I could, thinking people need not neglect one like this after a ball.

When Nelly and I reached the dining-room, I could no longer doubt that something unusual had occurred, and when I rang for Beal he appeared looking as if he had seen a ghost.

"Beal, what is the matter ? Do bring our breakfast, and—where is mother ?"

"Mrs. Ballantyne is gone out, miss. She left word the young ladies were to pack their boxes, as Miss Kelly is out."

Our conjectures were many. Were we all going to the sea ? We never did go early in May. Was father obliged to leave town on business, and were we going with him ? Mother might have told me ; and how strange she should go out in the morning, delicate as she is ! How tired a dance made one, and how tiresome everybody was !

Nelly was a very sweet-tempered girl, everybody loved her ; and Tom, who had no regard for feelings, often called me "Cross Patch" or "Miss Impatient" ; but one's young brothers are usually impertinent.

George, being several years older than myself, understood me better, and, indeed, we shared many of our thoughts, and he always put up with my impatience with a smile. Father had a very rich West End living; but as mother was delicate, and we were young, we never thought of mixing ourselves up in parish work. So many ladies liked doing it, we said, and we preferred society. Father, I know, often regretted this; but he said nothing, being the gentlest man on the face of the earth—too gentle, in fact. He had married from love; but, then, though almost penniless, as rich people said, mother was very pretty. George had been too delicate as a boy to go to school, but, being now much stronger, he was thinking of going to Oxford, and was looking forward to it with much pleasure.

That was our history till this eventful morning. It never entered my head that life was not made merely to be enjoyed, and, having at last done with governesses and schoolroom days, I had golden visions of balls, parties, offers, and in the future a rich husband. Nelly's ambition was to marry a man with a V.C.

But to return to reality. We wondered so long that at last we decided that we felt too stupid to pack much; besides, we hardly knew what to pack up, being but little accustomed to wait upon ourselves.

At last a cab drove up to the door, and we ran downstairs to meet mother in the hall. At the first sight of her face we were both so much startled that we could only exclaim:

"Mother, what is it? Tell us quickly!"

"My poor girls! It seems too dreadful. Have you done your packing?"

"No; what are we to pack? Where is father?"

"He is gone; but do not ask questions. The servants are all paid off. Kelly will not leave us, so she has gone to Hilton Moat to make it ready for us. She took Tom with her; George is with your father. We must start by the two o'clock train. Pack all you can of your personal property; the rest will be sold."

Nelly and I were struck dumb for a few seconds; but necessity does not wait. Mother was so wonderful, so unlike herself, that we had to follow her example. Nelly rushed away and brought back a glass of wine, saying in her gentle voice:

"Drink this, dear mother. We won't ask questions; but are we poor?"

"Ruined—worse! Your father will have

to live abroad; and thank Heaven we had warning. My poor little hundred a year and Hilton Moat is all we have till——"

She did not finish her sentence, and we hurried away. Truly life was all topsyturvy. Last night we were the spoilt and petted Miss Ballantynes; to-day we were going to hide ourselves in a small farmhouse. It was only when, having performed wonders in packing our boxes, and when we were actually nearing Hilton Moat, that mother found words to explain to us the reason of our strange misfortune.

We were alone in an old country fly, driving slowly over the two and a half miles which separated us from the village and station of Hilton.

"Poor children," said mother, for the first time daring to look at us without suppressing her tears, "I have never brought you up to expect this or to be prepared for it; but how could I guess? You have never seen, but you have heard of Miss Terry, your father's ward, who lived in the north of England. She married last year a certain Captain Webster. Her large fortune had been well looked after by your father and an old Mr. Reeves. As she was so near her majority, the guardians, at the young people's earnest entreaty, gave up the fortune to the husband. This man has turned out to be a scamp. He gambled away the money, and now comes upon the guardians again for it when his wife attains her twenty-first birthday. Legally, they are responsible. Poor Mr. Reeves at once sent your father a warning, telling him to cross the Channel at once. He himself, I have since heard, has been killed by the blow. He had a stroke, from which he never recovered. George was asleep when the messenger came at five o'clock this morning. We called him, and he at once decided to exile himself with your dear father, who would not hear of my taking such a hasty journey. I think I have done exactly as he told me, and I must wait patiently; but that Captain Webster and his wife are——"

Mother paused, then she closed her lips firmly. I shall never understand how she was able to get through all that moving, she who usually was waited upon hand and foot.

At last the fly drove up at Hilton Moat, an old, quaint place, which had once seen better days. The door was thrown open, and there stood Kelly and Tom to welcome us! A fire was blazing on the old brick hearth of the kitchen, and

the old woman who had been caretaker was helping Kelly to prepare a dinner. Dear, good, faithful Kelly had made mother's bedroom as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances, and, after a very poor dinner, we got her to bed. Then I sat down and cried my heart out, whilst Nelly kissed and comforted me as best she could, and Kelly tried to think of all the cheering things she knew, and all the might-have-been-worse kind of consolations. Tom, on the contrary, was very cheerful. He thought this picnic life quite delightful, and was proud to give us two small and very muddy-tasting trout for our supper; but what consoles a boy is not sure to make up to a young lady of eighteen for the loss of her money.

When I had, from very shame, dried my eyes, we sat up talking and taking stock of our means, and trying to settle how to make the best of the situation.

Of course it could only be for a few weeks, and we must put up with everything. We were to keep ourselves to ourselves for father's sake, and we were to go by the name of Grant, to Tom's intense delight, who thought changing your name was what few boys were allowed to do. At last Kelly drove us all to bed. Nelly and myself shared a large, low wainscoted chamber, which Kelly had tried to arrange prettily. How she must have worked all that long, sad, weary day; but looking at what I called a dreary hole, I could not help being sad, and Nelly exclaimed:

"Well, Dora; do cheer up. Let's call it a picnic-party. In a few weeks we shall go abroad and join father; mother will never live long away from him and George."

"To think that last night you and I, Nelly, were at Cousin Mellish's dance, and that we were so happy, and so much admired—at least, you were admired, and my partners said I danced beautifully. Nelly, dear, I must confess I packed our two crushed ball-dresses."

"Oh, dear, they will be useless here. I dare say the law will punish Captain Webster and his horrid wife, and then we shall——"

"Nelly," I answered, solemnly, "if ever we meet either of them we must not dream of speaking to them; I shall cut them."

"Don't say that, Dora. Surely they can't be happy if they are so very, very wicked."

"I hate them; yes, I do hate them."

Nelly did not answer me, for she had fallen asleep, and had she been awake I feared she would not have endorsed my

sentiments, for once she had said: "Oh, Dolly, I never can manage to hate people; I wonder how you do."

CHAPTER II.

NELLY'S picnic was a very long one, and the novelty of the situation soon wore off. Very soon, too, we discovered that mother's heroic effort had been but the energy of despair; the blow had fallen so heavily and so suddenly upon her weak constitution, that after three days we had to send for Dr. Haynes, whose house was close to Hilton Station. He only knew us as a family of the name of Grant, who were spending the summer months at Hilton Moat. He was a clever man, very silent, very abrupt, and there was no fear of his finding out our real name. When mother asked him if she was well enough to go abroad, he could only answer:

"You must wait a little; you could not travel in your present state, certainly not."

I could see that he considered mother far too delicate to move.

Happily for us, Kelly was a farmer's daughter, and she displayed a genius for authority which was very necessary. She made Nelly look after the poultry, and set Tom to work in the garden, much to his delight, for he declared that when he grew up he should be a farmer or a colonist, and that he was very glad we were too poor to send him back to school. I must confess that during the first ten days I tried to think mother required my constant presence in her room; but the true reason was that I hated dirty work, as I called washing dishes and making beds; but Kelly's and Nelly's uncomplaining labours shamed me at last, and I unwillingly took my share. Of course, I undertook all the writing, for the constant letters to George and to father were an interest to mother. George wrote us very amusing letters, making the best of everything, and saying he had given out he was a very learned English professor, ready to teach anybody and everybody English for three francs an hour. This low sum was not the price he considered sufficient for his talents, but simply chosen because no one would give him more. Mother cried over these amusing letters, and said poor George was the greatest sufferer, as he lost all prospect of going to Oxford; privately I thought that I was the greatest sufferer.

So time passed slowly to me and to mother, but quickly to the others, who were

so busy and so unselfish. I could not be resigned; I could not feel I deserved this terrible change and uprooting; and when I tried to say my prayers I could not from my heart repeat, "Thy will be done on earth"; above all I could not say, "Forgive us as we forgive." I did not forgive those two who had so wickedly, so unjustly plunged us into misery, and caused the separation which was killing my gentle, delicate mother. No, I could not do it; how was it to be expected of me?

Gradually the days of happiness seemed to become unreal and to disappear very far behind us. Many of our friends believed we had gone abroad with father, and the one or two near relatives in the secret offended mother by blaming her husband. One or two offered us pecuniary help, but mother answered decidedly that "Charley would not like it," and with her that was law. Now and then I could see that she read my heart by the pathetic look in her eyes, so at last I determined to put on a cheerfulness I could not feel. Kelly was our real pillar of strength, and when mother said she really ought to go because it was impossible to pay her wages out of our small income, she indignantly replied:

"You may drive me away, ma'am, but I shall come back; Miss Grant and Miss Nelly do want looking after so much, and Master Tom, though he does wonders, is a little hasty with his spade. Till better times come, ma'am, we'll share and share alike, if you please."

I admired Kelly's conduct, but still I rebelled against this trial, and above all I hated my enemies!

Thus the summer months passed away, and chilly autumn came on. The country made me long for the London pavements, the mud was very depressing, and Tom's delight in it seemed to make me still sadder because I could not catch his light-heartedness. When I could get away for a few moments unperceived, I went upstairs and took out my crumpled ball-dress to look at and to cry over. That evening I had been, oh, so happy. Dick Hartley had danced so often with me, and—and— Well, now, of course, he would have heard of our misfortune and would dismiss me from his mind.

I must not linger longer over all our experiences, our makeshifts, and our "experience lessons," as Nelly called them. In spite of myself, I learnt a great deal, and Nelly and I became quite quick and

clever at house-work, but Nelly sang snatches of songs about the old house whilst I went very gravely to work. I could not forgive and I could not forget my wrongs. Nelly and Tom were happy, I was only rebellious, though outwardly I often took the lead and worked wonders. As to society, we had none. The clergyman of Hilton was an old bachelor, who once called upon us and then concluded that he had done his duty to the strangers, and the doctor came purely professionally, and talked as little as possible. There were a few gentlefolk within four or five miles of us, but they had not called upon us; why should they, as we had no introductions? So we learnt the real meaning of living in the country when winter came on, and the mud increased, and the fog threw its cold veil around us. It was then we learnt to appreciate the few books I had brought away with us, and even Tom became an attentive listener when we sat in mother's room, I reading aloud, he carving, Nelly sewing, and mother lying back with closed eyes.

This monotonous life went on till Christmas Eve. When every one was gone to bed, I sat up finishing some Christmas gifts I had made, determined, at all events, to try and look happy. With some pangs, I had made use of my ball-dress for this purpose. The white silk skirt served to line a couvrepied for mother. The sash served the same purpose for a muff for Nelly. It was made of rabbit-skins prepared by Tom, and Kelly was to have a boa of the same expensive fur, the sash again doing duty for lining. The finishing touches took some time, and I heard the clock strike eleven strokes before I had quite finished. This hour seemed to us, in our present position, a time of deep slumber, for now we knew by experience the worth of the saying, "Early to bed and early to rise."

I was just packing up my several gifts when the sadness of our present position came over me so strongly that I walked upstairs sobbing bitterly. I heard or seemed to hear a distant peal of Christmas bells ringing out, "Peace on earth, goodwill to men." No, I thought, that message had nothing to do with me. I could not receive that peace, because I had it not in my heart. "Those horrid people are enjoying themselves at this very moment," I thought, "whilst we are slaving away on next to nothing. I can't wish them 'goodwill,' I can't."

Hastily I distributed my gifts on the breakfast table, and then with a heavy heart I too went to bed.

I could not have been asleep much above an hour when I was roused by Kelly's voice.

"Miss Dora, wake up, your dear mother is ill—very ill, I am afraid. Miss Nelly is lighting the fire, and we shall do the best we can till the doctor comes. You must fetch him."

I was out of bed at once.

"Fetch the doctor now? Oh, Kelly, can't Tom go?"

"He could go, of course, but he had a bad cold last night, and we must not have two invalids. You are strong, Miss Dora. My dear, it is better you should go."

Kelly was right; it was better I should go; and after hastily glancing at mother's pale face and hearing her laboured breath, I dressed as quickly as possible, and, wrapped up by Kelly and Nelly, I started on my lonely walk.

It had been snowing; the road was white, but there was no great depth of it; the stars were bright, but there was no moon. How quickly I walked; the stillness was strangely beautiful, and the snow seemed to give light. "Peace on earth, peace on earth," twinkled the stars, and the planets added the unchanging message of "Good-will to men." But that found no echo in my hard heart. I had no good-will for "those people," none.

At last I was nearing the village. I could see a dark cluster of houses against a darker background, and one or two lights at the station. To my surprise, I suddenly saw a light burning in a cottage window close by, and I remembered that only yesterday or the day before the cottage had been uninhabited. My curiosity was so much excited that I did not look where I was going, or rather the snow hid a large stone which lay just in front of the cottage. I trod on it, my foot turned, my ankle twisted under me, and I fell uttering a cry of pain.

In a moment the cottage window was thrown open, and I heard a clear, soft voice, saying:

"Who is there? Is anything the matter?"

Certainly this was a lady's voice, and my relief was as great as my surprise.

"I am going to fetch the doctor for my mother, Mrs. Grant, who is very ill, and I am afraid I have sprained my foot. What shall I do?"

The window was shut, and before I had done more than half raise myself, a slender figure dressed in black came quickly down the snow-covered path of the cottage garden and stood beside me offering me her hand, whilst the sweetest voice I have ever heard said:

"Come into my cottage and rest; my fire is not out yet, and I will fetch the doctor for you."

Supported by her, I painfully limped up the path.

"No, indeed, you must do no such thing; if I may rest a few minutes I shall soon be better."

She gave me a chair close to the fire, and by the light of a small lamp I gazed at this friend in need. She was a widow, of course; her face looked intensely sad, though calm and peaceful; her dark blue eyes had the far-seeing look which always adds mystery to a face; her hair was light brown, and waved and curled round her small head, without, however, making it look untidy. I was only eighteen, and I fell in love with this beautiful, kind stranger at first sight. What could she be doing here, alone, too, in a common cottage? She saw my look of surprise and answered it; perhaps, too, she was accustomed to being thus questioned.

"I am very poor, and as I heard this cottage was to be let very cheaply, I took it. I think I can make my two ends meet here." As she spoke, she fastened a long cloak round her slender throat.

"We are very poor, too," I said, ready with my confidence, for her face inspired it. "We live at Hilton Moat, an old farmhouse some way from here. We are trying also to see if we can make our ends meet, Mrs. —"

"Mrs. Walters. Now I am going to fetch Dr. Haynes. Indeed, you must let me; this may be the only good office I can do for my neighbours, and—it is Christmas Eve."

Her face, sad as it was, was transformed by a beautiful smile—a smile which revealed to me a depth of love of which I knew so little—and, in spite of myself, old familiar words came floating into my mind, words which had never impressed me till now: "I was a stranger, and ye took me in."

Before I could add another word, the girlish form in black had gone, and I saw her hurrying up the white road.

She came back sooner than I had expected; indeed, the distance was not very great, for the cottage was just on the outskirts of the village.

"I delivered your message," she said, smiling quite brightly. "How is your foot, Miss Grant?" I assured her that it was much better, and that I believed I could even walk home if it were necessary.

"The doctor will call for you in a few moments; he is driving a gentleman along this road, but he says there will be room for you."

"How strange! Where can a stranger be going at this time of night?"

She took off her cloak and sat down opposite to me. I noticed that her hands were beautifully shaped, though somewhat rough, as if lately she had used them in house-work; also I saw she wore a massive wedding-ring, and a slight gold keeper, but no other jewellery.

"This cottage will be rather a lonely place," I said, still wondering. "I suppose you will have a servant."

"No, I can easily do the little that I require; besides, I may not stay very long. I take this cottage by the week; I have tried several already in various parts of England."

"You did not like them? I should not like to change my home often. The one move we made was bad enough. I suppose you soon get tired of a place?"

The sad look I had previously noticed passed over her face, and tears gathered in her eyes.

"I am not likely to stay here very long, but I do like the look of this place, and you see I have made a friend already."

"You like new places and new faces," I said, disappointed with my beautiful stranger.

"I try to do so; there are nice people everywhere. Sympathy is like God's manna, it is gathered every day and very easily."

I was not in any way prepared for universal benevolence, but I wanted Mrs. Walters to stay here as long as we did, and I said so.

"You must stay here a long time, and come and see us very often. We can, perhaps, make Christmas more lively for you. Will you come to-morrow? Please do."

At this moment the doctor's dog-cart drew up. I rose slowly, and with Mrs. Walters' help, I went to the door; then I uttered a cry of joy, for George himself jumped down from the cart and ran towards me.

"Dora!"

"George!"

"How is mother? Can you walk?" Mrs. Walters very kindly said she had kept you near her fire."

George seemed to have found out the widow's name and all about her; indeed, he was profuse in his thanks, and as I followed my brother I repeated:

"You will come and see us to-morrow, for I have not yet thanked you properly for all your kindness. And you knew my brother had come—no wonder you smiled."

"Yes," she said, standing by the door, with the light of the lamp making a strange bright background for her delicate outline. "Yes, I knew, and I fancied I might be able to say, 'A happy Christmas' to you to-morrow, that is, if Mrs. Grant is better."

"A happy Christmas! a happy Christmas!" and then we drove off.

"What a perfect face!" said George.

"I always distrust these pretty widows," said Dr. Haynes; "they have no business to live alone, there is generally something wrong."

"Do you know anything about her?"

"I! Oh, no; except that, as the cottage is mine, I am her landlord; but it is a weekly rent paid in advance."

"She is a saint, I am sure," I said, indignantly.

"Humph."

We said no more till we reached home, then all was surprise, joy, and anxiety. Mother rallied under the doctor's care, but it was the news of George's arrival that seemed to act like magic upon her. She wanted to see him, to lie with her hand in his; she wanted to hear all about father. How her face lighted up when she heard that it was his thought, sending George to us as a Christmas present!

The next day there was a white Christmas garment over the earth, and the bells rang out cheerily through the frosty air, "Peace on earth, peace on earth, goodwill to men;" and George said:

"That does sound like home; and, Dolly, when I first saw the widow's face at the doctor's door last night, and heard her give your message, I thought, 'There is no such face as that to be seen abroad.'"

"Why, George," I said, "one would say you had fallen in love!"

CHAPTER III.

DURING mother's convalescence we had much to hear from George about himself and father. He and I were able to go to

the Christmas service at the village church, and when we came out Mrs. Walters, who was there, allowed us to walk home with her, for, of course, I was anxious to cement the acquaintance—friendship I called it to myself. I thought she looked sadder and more pathetic than the evening before, but George declared that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and so young to be left a widow. I begged her to come and spend the evening with us, but she suddenly looked up at me and said: "But I am a stranger, and you know nothing of me. I am too poor to go into society."

"Society," said George, laughing a little bitterly; "I think I may truly say that we are outcasts of society;" then he added, quickly: "not through our own fault, however, but because of the rascality of others."

Mrs. Walters looked intently at George, and then she answered:

"Then you are the happier of the two."

"No," I said, indignantly. "They are rich, and we are poor, and I dare say at this moment they are congratulating themselves on their cleverness."

Mrs. Walters turned quickly, and put her hand on my arm, as if I had hurt her.

"Don't say that," she said, quickly. "You must not be hard on any one to-day—even in your thoughts."

Well, Mrs. Walters did come and see us, and we made her welcome, and asked her so often that gradually we exchanged daily visits. We were all fascinated by her gentleness and goodness. Even Kelly succumbed, though, like Doctor Haynes, she was apt to be suspicious of strangers. The only thing that troubled mother—I was too much in love with her to be troubled about anything—was the fact of her constant change of abode. We heard of at least six homes she had had in as many months; but George took up the widow's defence.

"She looked so delicate, most likely she required constant change of air," and this excuse made us all laugh.

One person, however, was proof against all her fascination, and that was Mrs. Walters's landlord.

"Humph!" he grunted, "you'll see, Miss Grant, that some day she'll disappear, and leave only a history behind her."

"It will be a beautiful history," I said.

Nothing could make me think evil of this my first friend, the first human being who, unintentionally, influenced me, and

always for good, whose words were always gentle, and whose judgements charitable. When with her I seemed to understand that all her actions were influenced by something far above all selfish considerations, and that what others thought of her did not enter into her mind. It was not that she ever preached or paraded her goodness; it simply wrapt her round like the atmosphere.

With all my love and my admiration there mingled the unexpressed fear that one day she would leave us as she had left the other places. I could not bear to think of it.

George stayed a month with us, and then mother, who had wonderfully improved in health, began to get anxious about father's loneliness. She said George must go back to him, for he must still live abroad till Captain Webster withdrew his claims, and he seemed in no way inclined to do this, so the lawyers said. The very name of Webster made George angry, so we agreed never to mention it; but the last afternoon of his stay my brother took me out for a walk, and began himself:

"If Captain Webster ever does——"

"Don't, George," I said, "don't let us think about those people."

"I was not thinking of them, Dora; but I was going to say that lately I have almost forgiven him."

"Why?"

"Because, but for that rascal I should never have seen Mrs. Walters. Dora, can you guess my secret?"

I blushed, for when one is eighteen a secret is so wonderful, and such a secret, too!

"Oh, George, we all love her! She is as good as she is beautiful!"

"Then, Dolly, do you mind sometimes mentioning my name—by chance, I mean? Of course, now I'm a beggar, but I shall find some post soon. The English Consul is looking out for me, and some day—anyhow, you'll be my friend."

I was in ecstasy.

"Of course, George. If twenty Doctor Haynes said things against her I should not believe them. She is a saint!"

"But fancy, Dora, we do not even know her Christian name."

"No; but I'll ask her, and tell you." The romance was altogether too delightful for words. "Besides, George, it is better to wait a long time. I expect she loved her first husband so much that she might say she would never marry again."

"Never marry again! What nonsense!"
 "If you were Number One, George, perhaps you wouldn't say that."

"I shouldn't say anything, as I should be dead. But really, Dora, I am desperately in earnest."

"Then I'll talk of you every day, George, indeed I will."

"That might bore her."

We smiled over this, but George looked much happier than at the beginning of our conversation.

My brother had settled to go by the mail-train, so as to give us his last moments in England, and as usual we gathered in mother's room for our last cosy evening, determined not to be sad for mother's sake. She sat holding George's hand in hers, and giving him many tender messages for father, such simple little nothings that would bring the tears to my eyes.

About nine o'clock our talk was interrupted by the entrance of Kelly, who came up to me, and said in a low voice:

"Will you come downstairs, Miss Dora?"

Of course, it was to consult about George's sandwiches, I thought, and ran out of the room, where Kelly paused, and said:

"Mrs. Walters is downstairs, Miss Dora, and wants to see you alone."

In a moment I was in our large cheerful kitchen, ready to welcome my friend and make her come upstairs. She seemed really to belong to us now that I knew George's secret, but before I could say anything the expression of her face made me pause. I knew something terrible had happened; her blue eyes had that awful, frightened, appealing look which speaks more than words; her hands held tightly the back of the wooden chair, and her voice was very low, but quiet and gentle as usual.

"Dora, my dear Dora, you have been so good to me, I could not go without telling you. You—all of you—have made my life so sweet here."

"Without telling me what?" I said, in a low voice.

"That I am going away this evening."

"For how long? This evening? It is so late!"

"For good—for always!"

"Impossible! You can't be going! When? Where?"

"This evening by the last train. I have left a few things in the cottage which I want you to keep as remembrances of me."

The tears would flow now, and I put my arms round her neck and cried.

"You mustn't go; we all love you; why must you go?"

"Because it is right. Don't cry, Dora. See, here is a little locket—I wore it as a child; I should like you to have that; it has my name on it—Mary."

"Is it a secret? Tell me why you must go?" I repeated.

Mary Walters sat down as if she were too weary ever to rise again. I knelt by her side. I was going to hear her secret.

"Listen, Dora. You have loved me without knowing anything about me. Few persons do that; I am used to distrust and suspicion; I found neither here at the Moat, and I was, oh, so grateful! I am going away to-day because my husband has found out my cottage."

"Your husband! Oh, I thought you were a widow. Poor George!"

"I never said so. I was married before my twentieth birthday. I was so young, so trusting, and I believed in him, and loved him. I gave him all I had, my love, my money, everything, and then—oh, Dora! I found out that he was a bad man. I need not add more. I would not have left him for that, though my heart was broken. I had promised to be his for better, for worse, but—"

"And then?"

"He loved only one thing—money, wherewith to indulge his passion. He dragged me abroad, and gambled away my fortune before my eyes. But I should not have complained even then, only—"

"Tell me," I murmured.

"I cannot explain everything to you; but then he tried to rob my guardians—he did it in my name. He claimed the fortune they had already given me, and which he had already squandered. Through their kindness we had had it on our marriage; the kindness was illegal, so the law allowed my husband to be a thief."

I hid my face in her lap for fear I should betray myself.

"And then?" I said.

"He ruined them. One died, and one has exiled himself with his family. That is all I know; but after that I had a right to leave him. I could not live on robbery. He hunts me down whenever I have hidden myself; but I cannot do this thing. I heard to-day, through a watchful friend, that he has again found me out; and I must go to-day, to-night, before it is too late. Kiss me, Dora, and forget me."

"Never! You have taught me so much. All that is best and noblest I have learned from you."

"I have taught you! Oh, no! I want to be taught. I ask Heaven to give me patience every hour of the day."

Then I rose up and kissed her, and loved her from the bottom of my heart, and as I did so I smiled, because I remembered that this was the woman I had vowed to hate. She would not see the others, and in a few more minutes she stepped out into the cold night air, and the moonlight for one moment enveloped her before she reached the shadow of the trees. Then she was out of sight.

I went back to mother's room as if nothing had happened. I dared tell no one, especially not George; but I resolved to go with him to the train, in order, if possible, to prevent his meeting Mary Walters. I would write and tell him the whole story; but I could not do it by word of mouth. No; I could not witness his disappointment.

Tom and I, we said, were only too glad to accompany George. We persuaded mother it would be "such fun," and so it was for Tom; but as for me, I hardly spoke two words all the way to the station, and neither did George, as before Tom we could not mention Mrs. Walters.

Arrived at the station, George and Tom went to get the ticket, and I hurried to the platform to see if I could warn Mary. I heard a train coming up; but the sleepy porter, who crossed the line, said it was not our train, only the "up." Ours would come in two minutes. The "up" pulled up suddenly, and only just long enough to set down a gentleman and his portmanteau. I saw him distinctly in the moonlight. He took up his luggage and looked across the rails, for the porter had hurried over to be in time for the "down."

At that moment Mary came out of the waiting-room, and seeing me, made a few steps towards me, thinking I had come on purpose to see her off.

The gentleman opposite called out at the same moment, "Hulloa, Mary!" and jumped down on the line. Mary turned sharply, and stood as if turned to stone. The sleepy porter ran forward from lower down the platform, waved his arms, and shouted at the passenger: "Back, sir; back; here's the down train." At the same instant George ran out of the ticket office. He had heard the train coming,

and the first thing he saw in the bright moonlight was a passenger tottering as if half paralysed in sight of danger, and knowing not whether to go forward or backward—his senses literally taken away by the terrible catastrophe which he could, however, realise. I never saw such an awful look on the face of a human being before or since. I hope I never may again.

Then, quicker than I can write, I knew that George had dashed forward in order to force the passenger to move; but it was too late, the down train was upon us, and Mary and I clutched each other without uttering a sound. We, too, were paralysed by fear. The next moment, however, I screamed, and I heard and understood nothing but my own cry.

When my senses came back to me I saw several men carrying something into the waiting-room, and Mary following them. Still I did not move till Tom pulled me by the arm.

"I say, Dora, come and help George."

"He's dead."

"No, he isn't—look!"

He shook me again. He said afterwards he thought I was going to have a fit.

I did look, and saw George supported by two railway officials, actually walking slowly along the line. The down train was gone, and I had never even seen it move. I tried to say "George," and my tongue refused to move, and then I remembered no more till Dr. Haynes said, angrily:

"If you could rouse yourself, Miss Grant, you might understand that your brother is quite safe. He has only a severe cut on his head. It's a miracle, but true all the same."

"And the other?"

I did rouse myself. He did not answer, and I knew that Mary's husband was killed; but at that moment, thinking that it might have been reversed, I burst into tears. I was no heroine; I am afraid that I never shall earn that title; for, in spite of the people around me, I sobbed out:

"Go and tell her that I don't hate him. Please go and say that."

"Hush!" said Dr. Haynes. "He cannot understand. He will never be conscious again."

That was long ago; but it is and always will be one of the most vivid recollections

of my life. That terrible accident brought many changes in our lives. Mary Webster's husband was not killed on the spot; he lived a few hours, but his consciousness never returned. We did not see her for a long time after that awful night. She went north, taking her husband's body, to lay him in his own country home, and then the overstrained constitution gave way, and for months she lay between life and death, allowed to see no familiar face and no countenance which could bring back the accident, for she learnt our true name that night. As for us, our exile was over. My father was able to return; but his health was too broken to take anything but a very small country living, where Nelly and I, now accustomed to the country, found out that we could be very happy out of town. George went to Oxford, and, considering his disadvantages, took a fair degree, and was afterwards ordained. His act of heroic daring was in all the papers, and made him quite famous; but the circumstances were too painful for him to care to have them mentioned.

Three years after we had a very quiet but a very happy Christmas in our country home, for Dick Hartley turned up, after having been abroad all that time, and then he told me very calmly that he had come in for some money, and now need not wait any longer to ask me a certain question. He had never thought of any one else since that "jolly dance, you know, Dolly," but he had not dared to say anything till he could come and carry me off.

Dick is the best and kindest of men, but he never knew that he married a very different "Dolly" to the Dora Ballantyne he fell in love with, and that the change was owing to the woman who also came to make that same Christmas Day happy, and who afterwards became my sister as well as the best and noblest friend I have ever had. So the rolling stone found rest at last.

Nelly lived at home till dear father's death, and then she and mother still remained at the little Vicarage; for the new Vicar would not allow either of them to go away, and Nelly had to say "Yes" to a certain question, so Kelly stayed on, we always said, on purpose to spoil Nelly's children.

But it was Mary's noble conduct that changed our destinies, and we can all say, "Heaven bless her!" when she sometimes says, "Have you really forgiven me, Dolly?"

AN ASSOCIATE OF THIEVES.

By T. E. SOUTHEE.

Author of "Locked In," "Who is She," "Margaret Benison,"
"A Haunted Memory," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

TWO young men, well and fashionably dressed, were sauntering down the Strand, smoking and laughing. When they reached Catherine Street, they turned off and made towards Drury Lane. They proceeded some distance in silence. Then the younger of the two commenced:

"I say, Walter, I am getting tired of these 'smokers.' You know I did not want to come to this one, and I only consented to please you. The thing is flat, stale, and unprofitable, and, after this, I shall cut the whole concern."

"Nonsense, man! What possible objection can you have? You're a prime favourite with the whole club, and when you attend you are always voted to the chair or the vice-chair."

"Oh, yes, that's all right enough. It's the club itself I'm disappointed in. When you asked me to join a literary and artistic club, I expected I was going to associate myself with a very different class of people. I expected to meet with men of wit and wisdom; instead of which, with the exception of yourself and one or two others, they are the veriest lot of duffers I ever came across. If literature and art can't produce something higher and better than the fellows we meet at these 'smokers,' I pity the two professions they are supposed to represent!"

"Pshaw! My dear fellow, you can't expect men always to be riding the high horse; they must unbend sometimes. I'm sure 'The Canaries' are as jolly a lot of fellows as you can meet in a day's march."

"Oh, yes, jolly enough; but so dreadfully vulgar! I'm sick of the whole concern. These concerts are nothing better than drunken orgies, and I am surprised that you do not feel as much disgusted as I do."

"Now, Joe!" replied the elder man, "don't be sticking yourself up on a pedestal as though you were wiser and better than all the rest of mankind. At any rate, if you want to give one of your high moral lectures, just select a more appropriate time and a more congenial audience."

"All right, old fellow!" replied Joe; "only understand that this is my last appearance among 'The Canaries'; but here we are."

The two passed into a brilliantly lighted tavern, ascended a broad flight of stairs, and entered a large room on the first floor. In this were assembled some forty or fifty individuals, and as the two young men entered the room there was a considerable amount of applause, and after a good deal of shaking of hands and a warm welcome from the assembled company, Mr. Walter Neame was voted to the chair and Mr. Joseph Gregson to the vice-chair, and the business of the evening commenced.

As the concert progressed, Joe Gregson did not feel inclined to alter his opinion of the musical abilities of "The Canaries." Some English ballads were fairly well sung; but the comic portion was mediocre and vulgar, and being himself a fairly well educated musician, Joe Gregson's soul rebelled against it.

As the evening progressed the libations of the party were of a rather extensive character, and unfortunately Mr. Gregson, though not appreciating bad music, seemed to fully understand the value of good liquor, and his orders for "another whisky" were frequent. Walter Neame noticed this with satisfaction; he did not want this young fellow to slip through his fingers.

It was also noted by one of Mr. Neame's supporters, who whispered, "Your friend Gregson's going it rather fast; when do you propose to admit him into the inner circle?"

"All in good time," replied Mr. Neame. "If matters are pushed too sharp we shall lose him altogether."

"Right you are, my boy! I'm not the one to spoil sport by precipitation, only I've set my heart on the bank business. If we were to succeed, what a swag there would be!"

"Just so," replied Neame; "but I'm afraid that's a long way off. He talked about cutting the club altogether to-night, as we came along, so we must be extra cautious."

"He'd better not try that game," replied the other; "'The Canaries' are not likely to stand that sort of thing. However, he knows nothing, so he can't peach."

"And he wouldn't if he did," replied Neame. "If we once got hold of him he'd be as staunch and true as the best of us."

CHAPTER II.

THE following morning Mr. Joseph Gregson felt remarkably seedy, and at one time he contemplated sending a note to the manager asking to be excused on account of illness; but then he had done this so many times lately that he thought it unadvisable. So, after a cup of strong coffee, and a pick-me-up in the shape of a brandy and soda, he pulled himself together and started for the City. He had not long taken his seat at his desk when the messenger came to him and informed him that he was wanted in the manager's room. Of course he knew well enough that he was in for a wiggling; but he put on a bold face and entered the room with a bow.

"Sit down, Mr. Gregson," said Mr. Benson, kindly; "I want to have some talk with you."

Gregson did as he was bid, and the old gentleman proceeded:

"You know that since you have been in our employ I have always taken a kindly interest in your welfare, and have given you a good deal of seasonable advice, upon which, I am sorry to say, you have not acted, and which, I am afraid, has been thrown away."

"I have always tried to do my duty in the office, and I had flattered myself that I had succeeded," replied Gregson.

"That is not the point, sir," said Mr. Benson, austere. "I am alluding to what takes place after office hours. I understand that you are leading a very dissipated life, and that some of your associates are of a most disreputable character!"

"Indeed, sir, in the latter case you are entirely mistaken. I admit that I have been leading rather a gay life, but I have never associated with any but gentlemen."

"Perhaps you think so, but I know better. Were the men you were in company with last night gentlemen?"

Gregson was silent for a moment. How did the old gentleman know where he spent the evening? "Well, sir," he said at last, "I can't say they were. I only went to a smoking concert given by an artistic and literary club."

"Artistic and literary," growled Mr. Benson. "My good fellow, is it possible that you have been so hoodwinked? But stop a bit and I'll open your eyes," and he touched a bell, which was answered by a

messenger. "Send in Mr. Rodman," he said.

When this gentleman entered the room Gregson started, and he was more startled when Mr. Benson introduced him, saying:

"This is Detective-Sergeant Rodman; you, however, know him by a different name. Now, sergeant," he went on, "tell Mr. Gregson what your report is of the society known as 'The Canaries.'"

"The club proper, or what they term the inner circle, or the nest, are all, to a man, thieves!"

"No, not all!" exclaimed Gregson, promptly; "not my old schoolfellow and friend, Walter Neame; he is an author and artist, and is well known as a contributor to the illustrated weekly papers."

"All quite true, sir," replied the sergeant; "but that is only a cloak to cover his more nefarious occupation."

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Gregson. "He is a gentleman, every inch of him, and would not condescend to do a mean action."

"It's all very well, sir," continued the sergeant; "but facts are facts, as you will very shortly see. Our plans are not yet matured; when they are, you will see what a narrow escape you have had."

"When I see it I shall believe it," replied Gregson, doggedly.

"I don't think you are taking this matter in the right light, Mr. Gregson," interposed Mr. Benson. "Mr. Rodman has certainly acted towards you in a most friendly manner. He took the trouble to find out where you were employed, and came to me to ask me to save you. Now, of course, you can see that after this disclosure it will not be safe for us to continue to employ you; but as your father was an old servant of the bank, and as I have the highest respect for your excellent mother, this is what I propose. There is a cheque for your quarter's salary, and also a quarter in lieu of notice. You can have this on condition that you go home to your mother and stay with her till you have permission to come back. Do you agree?"

"I cannot do otherwise," replied the young man, sulkily, "though I think you are treating me rather hardly. Supposing all that the sergeant says is true, I am entirely innocent of any complicity in the matter."

"That I quite believe," returned Mr. Benson; "but still I do not see that we are treating you hardly. We are going

to give you four months' holiday and pay your salary all the while."

"It is not that, sir," said Gregson, sadly; "it is that you no longer trust me."

"Not exactly," replied Mr. Benson, "but it is a necessary precaution. Mr. Rodman tells me that there is a scheme on foot to rob this bank, and that you were to have been the chief instrument in enabling the gang to accomplish their object. You were first to be induced to take impressions of the keys of the outer office and the strong room, and afterwards to report the time when, as Mr. Rodman phrases it, they could get the largest swag."

For some seconds Gregson stood paralysed with horror. "Good Heavens!" he cried at last, "did they think me capable of such meanness and treachery?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Rodman. "Mr. Walter Neame explained the whole matter to me, and last night he told me that you were disgusted with the whole concern and talked about sending in your resignation."

"That, at least, is correct. If this had not happened, you would never have seen me at any of these smokers again, and I shall send in my resignation at once," said Gregson.

"No, you will do no such thing," replied Mr. Rodman; "that would spoil everything. We are going to have a grand capture; but we must make sure of a conviction before we make our attack."

"Well, I am quite willing to be guided by you and Mr. Benson, if you will tell me what are your wishes."

"Then, when you leave the bank you will go straight to your lodgings, pack up what you wish to take with you, and at once proceed to the Paddington Station and take your ticket for Plymouth, where I understand your mother is living. You must not write any letter, or see any one, or communicate with any one but your landlady. You will say nothing to her except that you are obliged suddenly to leave town, and that you will write to her, if need be. If you adhere to these instructions, well; if you attempt to act in opposition to them, you will find out your mistake. You have been for some time past under police surveillance, and are known as 'an associate of thieves.'"

"That will do, sir; that will do!" exclaimed Mr. Benson. "There is no need for any threats."

"Perhaps not, sir," replied the sergeant;

"but it's quite as well that this young gentleman should know what a mess he has got himself into."

"Just so," said Mr. Benson, rising. "Time passes, and I must bid you good morning." And then, turning to Gregson, he said: "I shall telegraph to your mother at once."

Joe Gregson cashed his cheque, and left the bank, and made his way to his lodgings as quickly as he could, and then he sat down to think. All that had transpired in the manager's room seemed to him like a bad dream. Could it be possible that it was true? Was it within the bounds of probability that his old schoolfellow, and dearest friend, should have fallen so low as to have become a thief, and, worse still, to have tried to entangle him in the same net? No; he could not believe it. Yet the detective's story fitted in so closely with certain covert allusions, made by some of the members of the club, which he at the time thought were spoken in jest, that his belief in Walter Neame began to waver.

But time was passing; if he wanted to catch the 1.45 train, he must pack up his things at once. This done, he called up the landlady, paid her the rent, and started for Paddington. He took his ticket, obtained a comfortable seat in a second-class carriage, and the train started. Now a new source of uneasiness arose in his mind. What was he to say to his mother, and what was he to say to a certain young lady to whom he was engaged to be married? Until these thoughts came into his mind, he did not fully realise what a reckless fool he had been.

The journey from Paddington to Plymouth is a long and tedious one, and what with the excitement of the morning and the worry of the situation altogether, it is not to be wondered at that by the time the train reached Bristol he was thoroughly tired out. The compartment in which he had taken his seat gradually emptied, and by the time they reached Weston he had it to himself, and had curled himself up, and was fast asleep.

At Bridgwater two men ran along the platform till they came to the carriage in which Gregson was sleeping, and one said:

"Here's an empty carriage. Get in here."

The train had not proceeded far when Joe Gregson, disturbed by the talking of the strangers, gradually awoke to con-

sciousness. There was something in the voice of one of the men that was familiar to him, and he lay quite still and listened. The voice was that of Walter Neame.

CHAPTER III.

Two ladies, the one past middle age, and the other just budding into womanhood, were seated in an elegantly furnished room in a small cottage situated in the outskirts of Plymouth. It was not that the furniture or appointments were of an expensive description; it was the judgement and taste which were displayed in their selection and arrangement which gave its chief charm.

The elder lady was seated in a low easy-chair, with a telegram in her hand.

"Coming home to stay till Christmas!" she exclaimed. "Ellen, dear, what can it mean?"

The girl thus addressed looked up from her easel, and asked:

"Who is coming home to stay till Christmas?"

"It's from Mr. Benson," explained Mrs. Gregson. "Joe is going to have four months' holiday. What can it mean?"

"Oh, never mind what it means. Won't it be jolly!"

"I don't see it in that light, my dear," replied the mother. "Of course I shall be glad to have my dear boy with me; but I'm afraid there must be something wrong. He says Joe will explain. If he's only coming for a holiday, what need is there for any explanation?"

Ellen shook her head.

"That's a riddle only time can solve. If we wait a few hours we shall know all."

"A few hours! My dear girl, it's now a little after two o'clock, and the London train is not due till a quarter past twelve. That's ten hours!"

"Well, ten hours will soon pass, if you don't worry yourself. Meantime, I've got my work to do, so I'm off to put on my things. It's my drawing-class at three, and after that there's the Brinklers to have a music lesson, so I shall not be back very early. Besides, I think Bella ought to know, so I shall call in and tell her."

"Do, dear, and ask her to come back to tea; I'll have it ready at half-past five."

So Ellen Gregson departed, and her mother was left alone with her thoughts. Her mind was full of anxious foreboding. Was her boy ill? Had he done anything

to offend her kind friend and benefactor, Mr. Benson? Four months was a long holiday; something must be wrong!

Punctual to her time, Ellen returned with her friend Isabella Snowden, the latter receiving a most cordial and motherly reception from Mrs. Gregson. She was a singularly beautiful girl, and as good as she was beautiful. It would be scarcely possible to imagine a more picturesque group than that assembled around Mrs. Gregson's table. She, though on the wrong side of fifty, was still a handsome woman; Ellen was very like her mother, and was a very attractive girl, her beauty being of a more intellectual character than her mother's; but it was Isabella Snowden who formed the great charm of the picture. She was the very personification of grace and beauty, and her very presence seemed to have a soothing effect on Mrs. Gregson's nerves. Her voice was soft and musical, and her smile enchanting.

"I don't see any cause for anxiety, dear Mrs. Gregson," she was saying; "at any rate, it's no use meeting trouble half-way; it's bad enough when it comes."

"Just so; but who is that coming across the lawn?"

"Who should it be, my dear lady, but Lieutenant Rennison come to hear the news?"

"Good afternoon, ladies," said the young man, who stood with a smiling face looking in at one of the French windows. "I've come to see if the good news is true; are we really to see Joe to-night?"

"Well, George, I hope so," responded Mrs. Gregson. "I had a telegram to say he would come by the last train. But come in. Won't you have some tea?"

"Certainly he will. Do you think he came all the way from the docks merely to satisfy his curiosity?" said Bella, archly.

"I think," said Mr. Rennison, as he slipped his tea, "I shall go to the station and meet him."

"Will you? That is kind," said Mrs. Gregson. "The train is so late that it would be impossible for Ellen to go alone."

"Ellen wasn't going alone," put in Bella; "you don't suppose that I should let my dear Joe come home without going to the station to meet and welcome him? Still, we shall be glad of the escort of our gallant friend here, shall we not, Ellen?" and she cast a sly glance at her friend, whose cheeks were unusually red.

So the evening passed. The girls played

and sang, and the Lieutenant, who had a good tenor voice, bore his share in the evening's harmony.

It was a splendid night, and the girls elected to walk to the station. They arrived in good time, and the train being punctual, they had not long to wait. The passengers all alighted; but, though the three looked anxiously and persistently, no Joe Gregson was to be seen.

Lieutenant Rennison spoke to the guard.

"Mrs. Gregson's son? Yes, sir, I know him well. I saw him at Bristol, and again at Exeter; he came by this train, I know; you must have missed him in the crowd. Stop a bit, I know the carriage he rode in, I'll have a look;" and he opened the door of one close by. "Why!" he exclaimed, as he pulled out a portmanteau and a Gladstone bag, "here's his luggage. This is a rum go. What can have become of him?"

There was no answer to this question, and the hearts of the two girls were filled with alarm. There was no mistake about the luggage, for both the portmanteau and the bag were labelled, "Mr. Joseph Gregson, passenger to Plymouth." It was evident, therefore, their owner had not arrived in their company or he would not have gone away and left them.

"It's very mysterious," said Mr. Rennison; "but I don't see that we can do any good by stopping here. We had better have a fly and take them home."

This was done, and the two girls got in.

"You will come with us, George?" pleaded Ellen.

"Yes, certainly," was his reply.

"Whatever will mamma say to this?" questioned Ellen, after a pause. "If anything has happened to Joe, it will break her heart."

"Now, don't worry," said Bella; "I've been thinking the matter over, and I see no cause for alarm. Something tells me that it will all come right in the end. Joe never does anything without a purpose."

"But what purpose could Joe have in leaving the train without taking his luggage with him?" asked Ellen.

"That's a mystery we cannot solve," replied Bella; "we must wait and see."

CHAPTER IV.

THE train rolled on. Joe Gregson lay perfectly still and quiet, listening to the conversation of the two men in the next

compartment. He knew perfectly well that the least noise or movement on his part, if heard by these two men, would, in all probability, cost him his life.

"I know the house as well as I do my own. I could find my way about it blindfolded. I was down here last summer on a sketching tour, and I got an introduction to the old baronet, and he showed me all his pictures and treasures," said Mr. Neame. "I also made the acquaintance of the lady's-maid, and she introduced me to the house-keeper, so that, one way and another, I got pretty well the run of the house."

"And you've waited a whole year? Well, you are a deep un!" exclaimed the other man.

"Well, you see, if a burglary followed close upon my visits to these country mansions it would create suspicion, and I should have the police on my track."

"And how are you going to get in?" asked his confederate.

"By one of the dining-room windows. I've often found 'em left open on hot nights; but, if they are closed, we've only to break a pane of glass and unhasp it, and in we go."

"And you really think the swag will come up to a thou?"

"Not a doubt. The lady's-maid said her lady's jewels were worth more than that, and I know exactly where to put my hand on them; besides which there's gallores of plate in the butler's pantry, and racing cups in the library. Oh, we shall have a glorious sack and be miles away before they wake up and discover their loss."

After this, there was silence for some time except the rumbling of the wheels and the puffing of the engine. Then there was a whistle, and shortly afterwards the train stopped and the two men alighted. In an instant Joe had decided to follow them, and, if possible, frustrate their intention. He stepped out on to the platform, and, passing up to the end, jumped over the rails into the road just in time to see Walter Neame and his confederate issue from the station door.

The night was cloudy, but, as the moon was almost at her full, there was light enough for him to descry two dark figures stealing along the road some distance ahead. They went on and on for more than an hour, the men ahead proceeding very slowly and leisurely. At last they came to a stile, and the two sprang over. When Joe came to it he paused, for, at

that moment, there came a rift in the clouds, and a gleam of moonlight revealed his quondam friend and his companion standing with their heads turned in his direction.

He dodged down, and crept under the hedge and listened. Not a sound was to be heard but the sighing of the night wind. He waited a few minutes, and then he took another peep; but the two men had disappeared, and he jumped over the stile and followed them. He pushed on over two fields; but not a soul was to be seen, and not a sound was to be heard. Here he was now entirely at a dead-lock, for he could not tell what direction the men had taken, and he was completely in the dark as to the whereabouts of the intended burglary.

At this moment a clock commenced to strike the hour. He counted the strokes—twelve o'clock. Where there was a clock there must be a house, and he at once made his way in the direction from whence the sounds came. He had not proceeded far when he stopped short and listened. Yes, he could hear voices and footsteps, and he advanced cautiously and saw two figures scaling the park palings which lined one side of the lane a short distance in advance. With a feeling of exultation at having once more got on the track of the burglars, he noiselessly followed them, and in a short time a large house began to loom in the distance.

Stealthily and noiselessly Walter Neame and his confederate stole across the lawn and disappeared into the shadow of the house. Joe waited under cover of some shrubs, and then he cautiously approached the spot where the figures had disappeared. Just as he had expected, he found one of the windows partially open, and vaulting on to the sill, and taking off his boots, he entered the room and made his way to the door, which was partially open, and beyond which a faint ray of light was visible. He stood there some little time, for he did not want to alarm the inmates till the robbers had secured the greater part of their booty. Presently the gleam of a dark lantern became visible, and the two men appeared, each heavily laden with a carpet bag, and approached the room in which he was secreted. He drew back behind the door, and there, with a beating heart but with admirable coolness, watched them deposit their burdens near the open window, and then turn and proceed in the direction of the stairs. As they softly ascended, they had no idea

that a Nemesis, in the shape of Joe Gregson, was dogging their footsteps.

They entered the drawing-room, and Joe, who had been following in their wake, paused till they commenced their operations, and then passed into an adjoining room, and seizing the bell-rope, he commenced to ring violently, at the same time shouting "Murder! Thieves! thieves!" Then, seizing the first thing that came to hand, he sent it crashing through the window.

For a minute or two Walter Neame and his companion stood paralysed; then, as the shouting and ringing and the crashing of broken glass continued, he drew a heavy jemmy from his great-coat pocket and dashed into the next room. There was a struggle, a blow, and a cry of pain, and then Walter Neame returned to his companion, and picking up the bags containing their booty, they sped down the stairs and disappeared into the dining-room.

The whole house was in an uproar; the men shouted, the women screamed, and Sir Thomas Kilbey, in a very airy costume, was loudly demanding what it all meant. The butler, who seemed to be almost the only person who had his wits about him, and who had, on the first alarm, rushed down to his pantry to look after his beloved plate, at this moment came rushing back and answered the baronet:

"It means robbery, Sir Thomas. The plate's all gone, every ounce of it."

"And my lady's jewels, too," cried the lady's-maid, who at this moment made her appearance.

"Who was it discovered it?" asked Sir Thomas.

They all looked at each other, and no one answered.

"Some one rang the bell and shouted; who was it?" demanded the baronet.

"Not me, sir," was the universal reply.

"It was in the small drawing-room, papa," said his daughter. "Had we not better go and see?"

"A very sensible suggestion, my dear Blanche," and he descended to the room in question.

"Oh, gracious, here's a man! Is he dead?" cried Blanche.

CHAPTER V.

It was the day following that of the burglary at Kilbey Hall, and Mr. Benson sat at his desk reading a letter;

it was from Ellen Gregson, and he seemed greatly agitated as he read it. "Surely," he said, as he laid down the letter, "the boy cannot have taken the matter so much to heart that he has committed suicide! No, no, he's too much sense for that! Poor Mrs. Gregson!" he went on, "I don't see what I can do to help her—hey, what is it?" said he, looking up as a messenger entered the room.

"It's 'The Echo,' sir," said the man. "Mr. Morton told me to give it you, and say that there's been a burglary at Kilbey Hall."

As Sir Thomas was an old schoolfellow and intimate friend of his, Mr. Benson laid down the letter, and commenced to read. The paragraph was headed:

"GREAT BURGLARY AT KILBEY HALL. SAVAGE ATTACK ON A YOUNG GENTLEMAN. CAPTURE OF THE BURGLARS."

He read on and on, and as he did so he began to, what he called, put two and two together. This young gentleman, who was still unconscious, and whose life was in danger, was quite a stranger to Sir Thomas, and also, as far as could be ascertained, unknown in that part of the country. Might not this be his missing clerk? So he went to the telephone and communicated with Scotland Yard, requesting that Mr. Rodman should be sent to the bank at once. "Take a cab, so as to lose no time," he said.

An hour afterwards Mr. Rodman and the manager were closeted in the bank parlour.

"Yes, sir," the detective was saying, "I think your theory is a plausible one, and I'll be off at once, because I'm rather anxious, too, to know something about the burglars."

"You think they are likely to be some of 'The Canaries'?"

"That's it, sir," replied Mr. Rodman; "it looks like one of Mr. Neame's jobs."

The following morning Mr. Rodman made his appearance at the Hall, and was ushered into the presence of Sir Thomas Kilbey, who received him courteously.

"You think you can solve the mystery of who this young gentleman is. Well, I shall be glad, as I want to let his friends know of his critical situation."

"You think his condition critical, then?" said the detective.

"Certainly. The doctors say it is very critical," replied the baronet; "he's quite unconscious. Come with me," and he led the way upstairs.

"Yes, Sir Thomas; it is as I suspected. The young gentleman's name is Gregson, and he is a clerk in a London bank."

"But how came he here, and why did he risk his life to save my property?" asked the baronet.

"That is an explanation for which we must wait. All I know is that he started from Paddington, and was bound for Plymouth, where his mother lives."

"Do you know her address?"

"Yes; Myrtle Cottage, Stonehouse. But now, Sir Thomas, let me ask you what has become of the burglars?"

"Oh, I'll tell you all about it. You see, they made off with the spoil; but our young friend kicked up such a noise, and smashed so many windows, that it roused the grooms and stablemen, and after a smart chase they captured them, and, what was more important, brought back the plate and jewels they were making off with. As there was no chance of getting any assistance from the police till the morning, we locked them up, as we thought securely, in one of the coach-houses. But in the morning we found they had made their escape, at which I was not particularly sorry."

"What sort of persons were they?" asked Rodman.

"One was tall, and the other short and stout; but really I did not take particular notice of their appearance, I was too anxious about our poor young friend here, and thought more about getting a doctor for him than of noticing what the fellows were like."

It was late the same day, and the family at Myrtle Cottage was sitting pondering over the strange disappearance of Joe Gregson, when a telegraph boy made his appearance; and Bella Snowden, in her eagerness for news, rushed out and took the red envelope from him and handed it to Mrs. Gregson.

"Who is it from?" she asked. "Open it and read it, my dear."

"It is from Sir Thomas Kilbey," she said, and it ran as follows:

"Your son has met with an accident, or, rather, was attacked by burglars, and is ill at my house. If you and any of your family like to visit me at Kilbey Hall, you will receive a warm welcome."

"Thank God! thank God!" exclaimed Bella, and the thanksgiving was echoed by the other two.

"But my dear boy is ill! Oh, what shall I do?" exclaimed Mrs. Gregson.

"Do, my dear Mrs. Gregson! Keep as quiet as you can, and be ready to start by the first train in the morning," replied Bella.

"No, no," remonstrated Ellen; "restrain your impatience; mamma must have her breakfast before we start. There is a train," she continued, referring to the time-table, "at five minutes past nine; we might catch that."

"We had better wire back and say what time we are coming, had we not?" suggested Bella.

"Yes, certainly," answered Ellen. "I will put on my jacket and hat and do it at once."

Isabella Snowden was of a hopeful and trusting disposition, and she tried hard to soothe Mrs. Gregson, but without much success.

"He'll die, Bella," she sobbed; "I'm sure he will!"

"The telegram only says he is ill, not dangerously," said Bella.

"That's just it; that makes me think he's worse than you imagine. Attacked by burglars—it's dreadful!"

"That's what puzzles me," replied Bella; "and then," she went on, "how did he get to Kilbey Hall? It's six or seven miles from the station."

"Yes, my dear, it's all mysterious. Why didn't Sir Thomas tell us plainly what was the matter? Attacked by robbers; why, there may be concussion of the brain, fracture of the skull, and trepanning. These wretches sometimes carry pistols, and he may have been shot at and mortally wounded."

Bella, though she was sad at heart, tried to put on a cheerful countenance, and smiled at the poor old lady's catalogue of woes. But, as her motto had always been never to anticipate evil, she continued to look on the bright side of the situation as far as she was able; and when she laid her head on her pillow that night she had strange misgivings. What if her lover were dangerously ill? Worse still, what if he should die? So Bella Snowden lay awake for hours pondering on the uncertainty of life, and at last fell asleep; at one time dreaming that Joe was lying on a soft bed with upturned face and tender smiling lips, whispering, "Thank Heaven you are come!" and at another that he was lying stiff and stark in his coffin, but still with the same tender smile on his lips.

"Here they come!" cried Blanche Kilbey, as the carriage appeared coming up the avenue. "I wonder what they will be like!"

"If they are anything like the poor young fellow upstairs," responded Sir Thomas, "they will at least be very good-looking; but come, my dear," he said to his wife, "we must go out to meet them."

"How is my dear boy?" asked Mrs. Gregson, as soon as the usual greetings were over.

"Very sadly, my dear lady, I am sorry to say; he is still quite unconscious," rejoined Sir Thomas; "but the doctor is hopeful."

"Nothing that could contribute to his comfort or restoration has been wanting," put in Lady Kilbey. "We have had two doctors and we have got a professional nurse; no expense will be spared, we feel so greatly indebted to him. You see, he saved us from a great loss. My jewels alone are worth more than two thousand pounds, besides the plate; but we value the former especially because they have been in my family more than two hundred years."

"Hillo! What's this?" cried the baronet. "Here's somebody else coming," as an open fly came in sight. "Why, it's my old friend Benson!"

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Gregson. "I'm so glad. I've not seen him for years."

Meantime Bella had been making friends with Blanche Kilbey.

"Is he your lover?" asked Blanche.

"Yes," replied Bella, with a nod and a blush.

"Are you engaged?" whispered Blanche.

"Yes," answered Bella, with another pretty blush.

"So am I."

And a chain of sympathy was at once established between them.

"Could not I go up and see him at once?" asked Bella.

"Yes, if you wish it; but won't you stop and speak to Mr. Benson?"

"No; at present he's a stranger to me."

So, while the others were engaged in welcoming Mr. Benson, the two girls slipped out of the room, Blanche explaining as they went, as far as she knew, how the accident occurred, and descanting volubly on Joe's bravery.

"How is he getting on, nurse?" asked Blanche, as they entered the room.

"Not at all, miss," was the reply; "he's

been worse this last hour, and I've had to give him brandy, and I think it's done him good."

Bella stood with clasped hands, gazing down at the pale face and prostrate figure of her lover. His breathing was slow and feeble, and, though his eyes were wide open, the pupils were contracted. At this moment a slight tremor passed across his face, and a gleam of consciousness seemed to shoot from his eyes. She sank on her knees, and, placing her soft cheek close to his, whispered:

"Joe! dearest Joe! my brave Joe! don't you know me?"

The lips quivered, and it was evident that he strove to answer. The nurse's face wore a smile of satisfaction; this girl's presence was doing her patient more good than the brandy.

"Joe," she continued, "you do know me, dear, don't you? I'm your own Bella, and you must get better and tell me so."

"Yes, dear," he said, faintly. "But where am I? It is all so strange."

"Never mind that," interposed the nurse. "We will tell you all about it when you are better."

"Hillo! hillo!" cried Sir Thomas, who at this moment entered with Mrs. Gregson and Mr. Benson; but the nurse stepped forward with a warning gesture.

"He's recovered consciousness," she said, "but he must be kept very quiet. You must all go away, and leave him to this young lady and me."

"Tell him presently that Mr. Benson is here, and wants to speak to him," said that gentleman, as they were all about to retire.

"Fetch him back, Bella, dear," whispered Joe. "It's Mr. Benson. I want to see him."

"I'm only to have two minutes, Mr. Gregson," said the manager, when he had shaken hands with him, "so I must cut it short. I came on purpose to see you, and to say that we shall be glad to have you at the bank as soon as you are well enough. Say nothing about the smokers and 'The Canaries'; that is all forgotten. Good-bye! Take care of him, young lady," he said, glancing slyly at Bella. "You know, he's quite a hero."

Of course, after this Joe got rapidly better. How could he help it when he was tenderly cared for by so loving and beautiful a nurse as Bella Snowden?

They were sitting alone one day, after his return home, in his mother's pretty

little drawing-room, when he turned to her and said:

"Bella, dear, how do you like Mr. Benson?"

"Very much indeed! I think him a charming old gentleman," she replied.

"Ah, yes," he said; "but he's more than that. He's been a true friend to me; he saved me from disgrace and ruin. I don't think we should have any secrets from one another, so I'll tell you the whole story," and he forthwith commenced; but as the reader knows it already we shall not recapitulate it. "So you see, dear," he concluded, "I've reason to bless the day when he pulled me up in my downward course, and showed me that I had, unconsciously it is true, become 'An Associate of Thieves.'"

ON THE OTHER SIDE THE RIVER.

A FARMHOUSE IDYLL.

By MRS. LEITH ADAMS
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CHAPTER I.

IT was a long time before Mrs. Garland, of the Red Farm, could be persuaded to advertise for a lodger. Things had gone very prosperously with her during the lifetime of John Garland, her worthy and respected spouse; but, since his short illness and sudden death, the sun of prosperity had not shone so brightly upon the dear old Red Farm. Perhaps when a woman—even so buxom and energetic a woman as Mrs. Garland—holds the reins, the apple-cart never does run quite as straight as when the driver is of the stronger sex.

Mrs. Garland had tried keeping a sort of farm manager, one Samuel McNiven; but the result had been disastrous, for it struck the said individual that it would be pleasanter to fill the post of chief than agent, and that Mrs. Garland was a very comely and pleasant woman, with a trim, tight waist, and an apple-red cheek, and burnished hair, that showed to no small advantage when her cap-strings were flung back over her ample shoulders.

The manager was a small, wiry man, with a freckled face, and plenty of common sense in his head—that is, on all but one subject—and that subject the fairer portion of creation.

He believed himself to be irresistible, even in his ordinary every-day attire; therefore, since any fool knew that women loved fine clothes, what might not be expected as to effect from his Sunday clothes?

Bedecked, then, in these marvellous garments, and with a tall hat—or, as the profane in those parts saw fit to call it, a "rhubarb-raiser"—on his head, McNiven called at the Farm—that is, knocked in a thoroughly genteel way at the front door, instead of walking in unceremoniously by the back.

The good woman went down into the house-place, and McNiven, like the Laird o' Cockpen, "bowed fu' low," taking off the rhubarb-raiser, which he had kept on on purpose, in great style. Then he began to speak, and Mrs. Garland listened. For a while she seemed puzzled, nay, almost dazed; then the colour came flushing to her plump cheeks, she threw back her cap-strings, as if she were stifling.

The tall hat upon which McNiven had so prided himself was in a moment out through the open window and flying into the cabbage-beds as though propelled from a catapult.

"Follow your hat," said the irate woman; "and never come here no more, Samuel McNiven, or it will be the worse for you. Did you think I would take up with a broken straw like you, after having owned such a proper man as John Garland for over twenty year?"

He cut a sorry figure, did McNiven, fishing his hat out from among the cabbages, and matters were not improved by the fact that one of the farm hands, leaning gracefully on a pitchfork, was watching the proceedings with his interesting countenance cut in two by a fiendish grin.

So the manager departed, and then Susie, and her aunt Henderson, and her uncle Ben, and various other members of the Garland family plotted together and brought strong pressure to bear upon the mistress of the farm.

"Things are not bad," said Uncle Ben, wagging his white head, and drawing his crimson and yellow Sunday handkerchief through his hands as an aid to eloquence; "not as you might say altogether bad, but not perhaps as good as when poor John was alive—that couldn't well be looked for, for John was out of the ordinary, and one whose ekal we're not belike to see no more. Still, considerin' all things, things are not so bad, and with a bit of ekin' out may make the fam'bly mighty coosie and comfor'ble."

All the rest zealously backed up Uncle Ben—he was, indeed, Great-uncle Ben, “and one as ‘ad ought to be took note on,” as Susie said—and the end of it all was an advertisement in a London paper, and the “redding up” of two delightful rooms that looked out into the farm garden through windows wreathed with roses and eglantine. One of these rooms—the “parlour,” as Susie called it—had a wide, low embrasure at one end, and you mounted a couple of shallow steps to reach it; indeed, it made quite a little fairy bower, for one side was all casement, through which the roses and the wine-coloured nasturtiums thrust their faces, while the jasmine peered in with its starry eyes; and on the other Mrs. Garland had hung some diaphanous pale curtains, placing a low, wide cricket-chair deftly cushioned at one corner, a tiny bit of a table near it, and a low stool worked in wools, and much prized as being the crowning effort of her girlish days, before it.

The bedroom was above, and just as dainty a nest as snow-white dimity and sweet-smelling lavender could make it.

Answers came in pretty freely to the advertisement, and it was impossible for the family at the Red Farm not to put on frills—metaphorically speaking—since the number of letters received for them at the local post office was quite unprecedented, and, as Susie put it, “caused remark”; a fact that was not unpleasant to her.

In several cases matters were carried still further, and would-be lodgers came down to view the rooms, also to be viewed by Mrs. Garland; but somehow the good woman did not take to any of them, and Susie sniffed when they were gone, until a certain day—a lovely, sunny, happy day—a May day, a gay day, a high day, when “Madam” arrived at the dear old Farm, and straightway the whole house fell in love with her, not excepting Grip, the broken-haired terrier, who was so fastidious in his selection of friends that his approval gave a sort of cachet to those upon whom it was bestowed.

Now Grip was sitting on the doorstep in the sunshine when Madam came. All the beautiful Midland country was waking up into life at the call and the touch of spring. The larches down by the little watercourse—which was hardly worthy of being called a brook, much less a river, and which yet was a thread of brightness through the green—were hung with tassels vividly emerald, and as feathery as the plumage of

young birds. The great currant-trees by the farmhouse were heavy with pink blossoms, and the daffodils were nodding in the gentle breeze.

Grip was not nodding.

On the contrary, he was alert from the tip of his curved and pendent ears to the tip of his neatly “docked” tail. He was on the look-out for an enemy of some sort; nothing else was wanting to complete his satisfaction in this most perfect morning, for to Grip, an enemy was as welcome as a soupçon of cayenne pepper in his consommé of chicken to an ancient gourmand. It gave zest to life and appetite.

But instead of an enemy a friend arrived, for a lady, rather tall and rather pale, with a sad, sweet face, and a low, sweet voice, came to the gate and spoke to Grip.

The dog trotted down the pathway (which was all edged with round, white stones, and, beyond that, with towering London Pride), sniffed at the stranger’s dress, looked up at her with his humanly intelligent eyes, and then—the deed was done. Grip had fallen in love at first sight—an accident which happens to dogs sometimes as well as to men. The house-door stood open, and from within came the sound of a bird’s song, also—but this from some distance—the regular rhythm of milk beaten and shaken to make it yield the golden butter, and the soft lowing of kine came from some far-off sheds.

“How restful it all is!” said the stranger, drawing a long, deep breath.

As for Grip, he had trotted deliberately up the wide, dark oak stairs, and now returned, painfully complacent, and treading as if walking on eggs, accompanied by the fluttered and agitated Susie.

“I have come,” said the visitor, “to look at the rooms you have to let. You advertised, did you not, for a lodger?”

Certainly they had advertised for a lodger; but they had not expected a lodger just like this one; for Susie, though country born and bred, had her instincts and her intuitions, and she knew that the plainly clad woman before her was something of a quite superior order, and dropped a curtsy to her as by instinct.

Meanwhile Grip’s stumpy tail ceased not to wag a canine welcome, and his keen eyes were raised to the sad face beneath the black wimple-like bonnet. For sad it was—the saddest, saddest face Susie thought she had ever seen. Mother had looked sad when father died; but her face had not looked like that.

This was no perturbed and wilful grief; not a sorrow stormy and troubled like a rushing river, but deep and still like a waveless tarn in the bosom of the silent hills. The rooms were looked at; the lady smiled to see their bright and perfect cleanliness, and the taste with which things were arranged, Susie looking modest and rosy as the mother gave her praise for diligent care of this or that, and saying, in her turn, that "mother had a grand touch in settling things—there."

Grip meanwhile looked from one to the other, as though he understood every word that was being said—a demeanour which Susie lucidly explained by saying it was "all his artfulness."

At last said Mrs. Garland, with an anxious look:

"Do you think you'll like the rooms, madam?"

This last word was a high attempt on the part of the hostess of the Red Farm to suit her conversation to her company; or, as she put it subsequently, when taking a friendly dish of tea with Mrs. Beans, the postmaster's lady, "to show that she knew the manners of the quality—which quality she is from head to foot, though plain as plain, and simple as the flower of the field that toils not, neither does it spin."

To describe the joy of Grip when "Madam" returned again to the Red Farm, and took up her permanent abode there, would be impossible. If he had known her from his puppyhood, and been reared at her knee, he could not have been more rejoiced.

But he was a thorough gentleman, was Grip, and, when the lodger was at last fairly settled in the drawing-room, pushed the door just a very little open, his sharp nose, black-circled eyes, and alert ears visible through the aperture, and, sniffing to announce his presence, waited. He had not to wait long.

A kindly voice called him, and, as he walked in, stepping on the balls of his feet as if he were stalking a mouse, and gingerly approaching her side, it was easy to see that a friendship was made and cemented on the spot; indeed, Susie coming in with the tea, found Grip extended on the hearthrug at the lodger's feet, a sort of self-satisfied smirk upon his face, and a sly look in the eye that was raised for a moment and then dropped.

There can be no doubt that Mrs. Garland's lodger gave a name of some sort when she came to the Red Farm. People spoke of her as Mrs. So-and-so, whatever the name

was. People called; at least, one or two did; but the reception they received was not encouraging. Even the Vicar—a man full of good-will, with a kindly voice and a heart of gold—felt himself repulsed. That he was so, preyed upon his mind for a time.

"That woman has known sorrow," he said to the wife of his bosom, who had also been repulsed, though with perfect gentleness and courtesy, "deep and biting sorrow, and yet, how far out of one's reach she would be if one had to try to comfort or help her! I never saw such a wonderful face; it is like beauty turned to stone by the continual dropping of tears."

Mrs. Vicar snorted. To do her justice, she could forgive coldness to herself; but that any one should not be delighted to know the Vicar, that any one should look coldly on him, was in her eyes as the unpardonable sin.

Then came a terrible shock, not only to this good lady herself, but also to the village in general. Mrs. Garland's lodger never went to church. It was a long time before people fully realised this enormity on her part. They were kind, and made excuses: peradventure she was ill; or, could it be that she was of some dissenting persuasion?

As to the first proposition, she was seen taking long rambles over the country, always accompanied by Grip, who would surely have died if she had gone out without him. As to the second: the brickdust-coloured Bethel down by the forge, which looked as though it had been built with soft bricks and then sat upon and flattened out, knew her not. The minister of the same was heard to speak of her as a "cast-away." The Vicar's wife shook her head when she was mentioned; the Vicar alone said and did nothing. Doubtless he thought the more, prayed the more earnestly, too, I doubt not, for "all who are desolate and oppressed."

Once he met the lodger at the Red Farm face to face. A little child, left alone while its mother went to work in the fields, set its clothes alight and was horribly, terribly burnt. All of us who know anything of such cases are aware of the fact that, after a time, the nursing becomes well-nigh unbearable, the very house in which the injured person lies a pest-house.

Well, just when things were at the very worst, he met the mother of the child.

"Are you able to leave your little one so soon?" he said.

"Oh, ay," said the woman, "Madam

from the Farm changes her rags every mornin' and bides wif her till I get my bit o' work done."

The Vicar turned his steps to the cottage, and without knocking went in. Through an open door he could see where the child lay, all clean and tidy, and on the poor little scarred face a smile, for "Madam from the Farm" and the little swathed-up mummy by her side were talking over things.

"I am sure you must feel very sadly, poor wee thing, being so ill; but you know, dear, we are all very sad sometimes," said Madam's gentle, sympathetic voice.

"Did you be welly sad one of these days?" said the child.

"Very—very—sad," and surely that was a sob that cut the words in two.

"Welly—welly—sad," echoed the little piping tones; "sad as me?"

"Sad as you? Far more sad than you; but listen, Maid Mollie, God is very sorry for us when we are sad, and one day He will comfort us. He will wipe away all tears from our eyes."

"I love God," said the little one.

The Vicar bared his head. He felt as though the spot whereon he stood was holy ground. He had meant to go into the further room, but somehow his feet would not carry him there. He turned and went out into the sweet summer sunshine, still swinging his hat in his hand. From this time forward, when any one spoke of Madam at the Farm as a person far from the kingdom of heaven, he would put in a few gentle words, and say that none can judge for another, for many are the ways by which people journey heavenwards.

After the incident of the burnt child no one in Redway—have I forgotten to say that the village near which Mrs. Garland's farm lay was called Redway-in-the-Dales?—would have listened to an ill word about Madam.

The poor can be censorious enough when they please, or, as Susie called it, "bitter-tongued"; but once touch their hearts, and the king or queen can do no wrong. You may say what you like—nay, you may prove what you like—but "Hoo watched by my Nancie when hoo were took for death." "She came to me when my Johnnie were drowned, and helt my hand i' hers a' through the bitter night." What have you got to say to such reasoning as that?

So the end of it was that Redway-in-the-Dales got tired of talking of the woman

whose very name they had forgotten, and were content to speak of her, on those rare occasions when they had any reason for doing so, by the sobriquet of "Madam."

And the Red Farm flourished exceedingly. Susie used to say that Madam had brought them "luck." Certainly Grip was of that opinion, and had long ago taken up the habit of lying outstretched upon the mat at the door of her room, "on guard," with one eye open and the other shut.

"She seems to have no friend nor want no friend beyond our Grip," said Susie; "an' he's fair set on her, so he is."

"He'd fret his blessed heart out if aught happened her," would Mrs. Garland reply, shaking her son's head.

Susie was full of even deeper thoughts.

"Mother, I often and often wonder to think whatever we did wi' ourselves before Madam came. I'd be as lost as Grip now if she were took from us."

Susie would not for a moment tolerate the idea that Madam could ever wish to go of her own free will. The mother and daughter had grown to love their lodger so much that they had ceased to wonder about her. For a time she had been a puzzle they were never tired of trying to unravel. She sent no letters and received none. Once a year a little, shrivelled old man, with a face like an aged chimpanzee, and a blue bag bulging with its load of papers, came down by the London train, had a long confidential talk with Madam in the pretty drawing-room, sat very much on the edge of his chair while he drank a glass of cowslip wine and nibbled a piece of Mrs. Garland's far-famed caraway cake, and departed as quietly as he came. Once every month or so a wooden box arrived, and Susie's eyes goggled in her head to see the wonderful new books that came out of it. She always asked the same question: "Be those fro' London?" And always received the same answer: "Yes, Susie."

In Madam's own room there was a picture. It hung over the little reading table, and was to Susie as great an object of veneration as any pictured saint to the simple Irish peasant. But with this difference: she had never seen it, because it was in a closed case—a case all carved in lapis-lazuli, and inlaid with forget-me-nots in ivory and pearl—and a tiny lock secured it; not that it would have needed a key to be secure from Susie if Madam saw not fit to show it to her. Susie was a lady in the best and truest sense, though only a farmer's daughter, who prided herself upon

being one of the most skilled milkers of cows in the Dale district, and a maker-up of fancy butter who need fear no competition.

Before this veiled picture in Madam's room fresh flowers were always set, as though before a shrine, and once a terrible thing happened to Susie. She, so fastidious, so careful never to take a liberty or to pry into Madam's affairs, went in hastily, fancying the room vacant, and there—there on her knees was Madam, her arms stretched out as towards some living presence, the fast tears streaming down her cheeks, and on the floor beside her, flung down, as it seemed, in a sudden frenzy of despair, a handful of wild forget-me-nots. With one amazed and troubled glance poor Susie fled, nor stayed till she got out into the big field where the fragrant hay was heaped in cocks. There, sinking down and throwing her apron over her head, she strove to still the trembling that shook her, the sobs that arose in her breast. Never in all her simple life had it dawned upon Susan Garland that life could contain such a passion of despair and longing as that of which she had unwittingly been a witness.

When she brought in Madam's tea that night the girl looked shy; there were pink rims round her eyes, and she turned away her head as she spoke.

"I've tossed up a jumble or two for your tea," she said. "They're counted dainty, and some say I've a light hand with them."

It was a little thing, perhaps, to do, but it was a relief to Susie to show her sympathy, even in so small a way.

The smooth and tranquil years flowed swiftly on. Here and there a thicker band of silver glistened in Madam's rippling hair; the lines graven by sorrow in her noble face grew a trifle more accentuated; but her step was as elastic, her form as slender and upright as ever; and many had been comforted in sorrow by her sympathetic voice, and many tended in sickness by her gentle hand.

The years had been as much alike as even-sized beads upon a string, and they had numbered five. To Grip they had been a time of great content, since he had been almost continuously in the company of the mistress he loved. Oh, yes, it had come to that; every one called him "Madam's dog." He was a little stouter in the girth by this time, and not, perhaps, quite so keen after rats; fonder of

sleeping in the sun, showing greater irritability with the flies, and snapping at them more viciously than of yore—but still a dog possessed by one idea, whose world was peopled by one creature only.

"I've heard her talking to him of an evening when they two have been alone, same as if he were a Christian," said Mrs. Garland to the postmaster's lady, "and seen him set there with one ear up and one ear down, and his head cocked o' one side, lookin' into her face like as if he knew every word she said. She'd be mighty lonesome, would Madam, if it weren't for Grip—my sakes!"

But the time was drawing near when Grip was to have a rival—when he was to learn the hard lesson of sharing with another the good things the gods had given him.

"Did you hear what's doin' at the Vicarage, ma'am?" said Susie, one day, when the brown earth was beginning to peep up through the snow, and a daring bird or two took heart of grace and sang a rather timorous but well-intentioned ode to the coming spring; "did you hear about the young lady from foreign parts?"

"I? No," replied Madam, looking up from her book with mildly wondering eyes.

It was not Susie's "way" to bring in bits of village gossip; what, therefore, was the meaning of this new departure?

"Well, she's come all the way from India—where the heathen live, you know, that we sing about on Sundays, the folk that Mrs. Snigson collects for in her box, and makes little flannel petticoats for."

"It is very kind of Mrs. Snigson, whoever she may be, to take so much trouble," replied Madam, smiling; "and I should think the flannel petticoats must be particularly useful—in India."

"That's what she says," answered Susie, unsuspecting of sarcasm; "she says those heathens will never be Christians till they take to wearing flannel petticoats; but, be that as it may, this young lady, Miss Florence May—isn't that a pretty name for such a pretty creature?—has come from those parts—quite sudden-like. Her mother, so it seems, was the Vicar's sister, and her father was a soldier out there fighting for the Queen."

"Was?" said Madam, more alert and interested now. "Then he is dead?"

"Yes, and the mother too—all in a moment, as you may say."

"The poor child!"

"You may say that, ma'am. Why, Mr. Snigson, he saw her at the station the night she came, and he says she was a mask o' sables, and just fell right into the Vicar's arms, and him crying over her like a child, and hushing her up same as if she was a baby!"

Madam got up and began to walk up and down the room, and Susie began to feel timid; but she determined to finish her story, just because her heart was full of it.

"She's like a bit o' painted chinay, so they say, is this young lady, and all over her head her hair curls in bits o' rings like a wee child's. The cook at the Vicarage told mother she was just a wonder, and so gentle-spoke, too; and now to see her struck down all suddint-like——"

"Struck down?" said Madam, stopping in her agitated walk, and looking Susie full in the face with those wonderfully sad yet searching eyes of hers. "Struck down?"

"Yes, ma'am—off her head, as you may say—burning hot one moment, as if she was in a fire, and shaking with cold the next. You see, they say she's pretty nigh broke her poor dear heart wi' fretting, and now she's got no strength left to fight against the fever."

"Fever! Why, she'll need most careful nursing," broke in Madam, eagerly.

"That's just what she can't have," said Susie, making believe not to see the interest she had roused, "for the Vicar's wife is a poor enough hand at it, as we all know; and of what account is a man at such a time, except to go round and upset things?"

"Why don't they get a nurse?"

"And where would they get a nurse? They'd have to send miles and miles to the big town; and they're poor folks, for all they're gentry. They could get Mrs. Dibbs; but then she's apt to take a drop and get drowsy."

"In a fever case that might be death to the patient," said Madam.

"Yes, ma'am, I suppose it might. It's a very sad thing altogether."

Then Susie went out abruptly, and shut the door—also abruptly—behind her.

She went into the house-place, where her mother was knitting by the cheery wood fire, set the door just ajar, and sat down almost behind it.

Presently there was a step, light and agile, on the stairs, then the sounds of some one stirring in the room overhead.

"I knew it—I knew it!" cried Susie, and clapped her hands together.

"Susie," said Mrs. Garland, turning round in grave reproof, "are you talking to the cat?"

"No, mother," said Susie, "I'm talking to myself."

Meanwhile, in the room above, Madam was also talking to herself.

The picture-case stood open, showing a man's dark-featured face, with marvellous shining eyes, and the sweetest smile just touching the mouth that showed beneath the drooping line of the moustache. It was the portrait of a man of thirty-five or thereabouts, not absolutely handsome, but wonderfully attractive, dressed in a brown velvet shooting-coat with a leather gun-pad, and a pale grey-blue handkerchief peeping from the breast-pocket.

Madam looked earnestly at the clear-cut, manly face, with its broad brow and sweep of raven hair, its tender shining eyes, its dawning smile.

"What would you say if you were here beside me and could speak, Hubert?" she murmured. "Nay; I know. You would pat me on the shoulder, as you used to do, and say, 'Go, little woman, go and give a helping hand where it is needed.' Then she seemed to forget the subject in hand, and went on talking to the picture. "I am not really a little woman, though you always would call me so. I am taller than the average, and you know that" (this with an exquisitely tender smile), "don't you, dear?" Then, after a little silence: "Well, I will go; it is a great step to take. It is breaking rule; it—hurts."

She kissed the picture, closed the case, tied her little snood-like bonnet on her head, flung a long black cloak over her grandly moulded shoulders, and was soon out among the shadows of the night, stepping briskly, with Grip trotting at her side. Having once made up her mind, she would be no laggard; and yet the magnitude of the step she was taking was very plainly set before her mind's eye.

It was one thing to go and nurse the sick poor—that entailed nothing further; but this going among strangers—people who were of her own order—people who would try to seek her out——

She hurried on to stifle thought, and soon the Vicarage lights glistened through the trees ahead.

When she came to the little white gate leading up to the house, she bent down and spoke to Grip, laying her hand on his head as he sprawled up against her gown.

"Grip," she said, "I am going in here, and I cannot take you with me. Go straight home and stay with Susie."

The stump of a tail drooped low; the sensitive ears lay close to Grip's head; but he set off bravely, stopped, turned, looked wistfully back, and then, at a wave of her hand, disappeared in the darkness.

Madam gave a gentle tinkle at the bell—a mere ting-ting—that would not have disturbed a sleeping fly. The Vicar himself opened the door, peered out, then started back.

"Madam!" he said, "can it indeed be you?"

"Yes," she said, her firm and quiet tone seeming to the troubled man unspeakably comforting. "I have been a trained nurse—the matron of a hospital for some years. I have come to nurse your niece, Miss May, if you will let me."

Ten minutes later she was duly installed in the sick girl's room; also she was bringing about an entire revolution in the state of the same, the Vicar's wife looking on in helpless amaze.

Where had been confusion, reigned order, neatness, perfect cleanliness, and dainty comfort. The face and hands of the sick girl, bathed with tepid vinegar and water, seemed already to burn less hotly; the golden head tossed less wildly on a cool, fresh pillow deftly smoothed.

"She will not take her medicine," said the Vicar's wife in a painfully loud whisper.

"Oh yes, she will," said the new nurse; and by some magic of voice and touch came off victorious.

Presently the Vicar came in, urging his wife to go and take some needed rest.

"Florrie is in safe hands," he said; "come, my dear. Our good Mary will be at hand if—Madam requires anything."

How Madam thanked him in her heart of hearts! A woman who makes a shapeless bundle of herself and sits crying by the fire, is such a terrible thing in a sick-room. So the Vicar's wife left the field, with as much dignity as the many wraps she had folded about her person allowed of. Alone with her spouse she vented a grievance.

"I wish she would go to church sometimes."

"I wish she would; but we must not judge."

"Oh, it is not that; but just fancy her never wanting to hear you preach!"

Day followed night, night day. The

battle between life and death was waged hour by hour, and at last life won.

No more the weary golden head tossed upon the pillow; the blue eyes were soft and smiling, and watched the strange nurse about the room as a dog watches its master. Then there came a morning when Florence said:

"Where is my nurse gone, auntie?"

And the Vicar's wife made answer:

"She is gone home, my dear. You are getting well now, Florrie, and your uncle and I are very, very thankful."

At which Florrie turned her face to the wall, and refused to partake of some special soup concocted by "auntie's" own hands.

A month later, one day, just when the gloaming was stealing over the world, and here and there a star twinkled faintly in the blue, Florence May, pale and wan, but for all that given back to life and hope once more, came softly up the pathway at the Farm, and—ushered in by Grip with an apologetic air as if he knew he was transgressing rules—made her way to the lodger's sitting-room.

Madam was seated by the cheery pine-knot fire that sparkled so brightly, and made quite a sunshine of its own, and rose in some agitation.

She put out her hand as if to keep the girl off.

"There is some mistake," she said, paling as she spoke and stepping back. "I never receive any visitors. I——"

"Yes, yes, I know," said Florrie, hurriedly, "they have told me that and—everything; but you will not, you cannot send me away; you cannot have the heart to do it when you see how weak I am still."

Here she panted a little and laid her hand upon the table, and Madam—all her professional instincts roused—caught hold of her and placed her in a cosy lounge.

"You have walked too far," she said, "and, besides, it is late for you to be out."

Then she unfastened the girl's cloak, took off her gloves, and put some scent upon the palms of her hands.

"How nice," said cunning Florrie, "to be taken care of by you—again."

And so the deed was done, the barrier for the moment broken down, and Grip, looking from one to the other, took in the position of affairs at a glance, and there being no way out of it, accepted it "from that time on," as Susie put it.

There was a good deal of "on," too; for many an hour of many a day did pretty

Florrie spend with the friend she adored, and at whose feet she sat. Incalculable advantage, most precious privilege to the girl were these hours of intellectual converse with a mind at once chastened and cultured, a heart tender, pure, and true. Through all her after life Florrie bore the impress of this time; through all her after life she carried in her heart a loving, tender, holy memory of "Madam at the Farm."

There came one day, when, perhaps, magnetic influences were abroad, and the two women more emotional than usual, when things took a closer turn. Madam was seated at her little work-table in the alcove already spoken of; Florrie sat on the step at her feet. Outside the world was now dashed with sunshine, now wet with tears—a very April humour; and the little birds were so light-hearted that they sang through the rain and through the shine "ta-ra-lira! ta-ra-lira!" while the thrush's low guttural laugh came from the thickets, and the lark rose from the dark, fresh-smelling mould, uplifted by the lilt and thrill of his own song.

"We have been friends so long now, and I have told you all about myself—all. There is nothing that you do not know; while you—oh, my dear! you are a riddle to me. I lie awake in the night and think of you, and wonder, wonder what your life has been. Ah! if you would only tell me, it would be a precious possession for myself alone, a something sacred which I should always cherish, as we do a jewel given to us by some one we love very, very dearly. If I were as dear to you as I sometimes hope I am, you would tell me something of yourself; indeed, indeed you would."

Florrie leant against the elder woman's knee; the golden head, "running over with curls," showing bright against her dark gown.

Then, in a moment, the girl was frightened at the effect of her own words. For Madam's face grew marble white, and a shudder shook her frame; her eyes, sombre and brooding, seemed to look at something very far away, and to be blind to all things near; her hand, resting heavily on Florrie's shoulder, struck cold and chill; and as she began to speak rapidly, her voice sounded strange and unfamiliar, like that of one who speaks in sleep. Florrie could only listen with her soul in her ears.

"I have not meant to be unkind to you—I have not meant to make a riddle of myself to you. I do—care for you."

So far Madam got, then stopped, sighed a rending sigh, and went on:

"It is no use talking of my early years, they were full of trouble and hardship; but I do not complain; better struggle and hardship than mere emptiness and inactivity, as some have. I fought for victory, and conquered fate; made my way as a trained nurse, and grew to love my work—nay, I loved it from the first. The worst cases were given to me; one, the worst of all, took all my skill. The man had been terribly injured in the street, and no one knew who he was. I never wanted—never asked to know who he was; he was himself, that was enough for me. I took no rest; I hardly left his side. When the doctors told me that he would live, I locked myself in my own room. I fell on my knees and wept aloud in the mad delirium of my joy. I was not a young woman even then—he some years my junior. I had no thought, no hope, no aspiration beyond emptying all my heart out at his feet; loving him ungrudgingly, absolutely, and living on the memory of him all the rest of my days."

Florrie's face was hidden in her hands; she dared not look up; she could only listen, listen, listen.

"Afterwards, when we met outside the hospital, and I knew that he loved me, I was like one who staggers in a blinding light. For me the glow and the passion of life came late, and, for that, was the more exceeding precious. He and I used to walk together under the trees in Kensington Gardens. If I were to go and walk there now, I should be taken up for a mad woman wandering at large; I should lie prone upon the ground and tear the grass. I have never gone anywhere where he and I had been together—never once—since—I—lost—him."

"Do not—oh, do not tell me any more!" cried Florrie, beside herself; "you cannot bear it."

But Madam took no heed. She was like a woman possessed by a frenzy. The long pent-up words poured forth like a loosened torrent which has surged and beaten against its barriers for years.

"It came about like this: he told me that his family—his people, as he called them—would never acknowledge me as his wife. The word 'wife' made me dizzy. I clung to him. I said: 'I can do without them if I have you.' With his arms about me, and his kisses on my lips, I had all the world; what more could I want?"

If I had trampled myself under foot, if I had torn my heart out, if I had let him go, he might be alive and well now; he might be happy in a home of his own, with children about his knee. My love was very great, it was my life, but it lacked just that touch of grace. We were married at a little quiet City church. It was a day something like this—a day of smiles and tears. I do not mean that I shed tears—I had no tears to shed, save tears of joy upon his breast; but it was in April time, and the sunshine was fitful."

She was silent a moment, and Florrie dared to speak.

"You were—happy?"

"Happy? Surely no one ever knew the meaning of the word but I! We had taken a little house in the country, near a river. No one wrote to us; no one knew where we were. If they had they would have taken no notice, for I had no one belonging to me, and his friends had cast him off. I do not blame them. They were of high lineage—I a daughter of the people. I was no fitting wife for him, but he loved me—he loved me! We spent such golden hours—boating on the bright water, wandering in the woods that bordered that lovely river. It seemed to me that I had never lived before; all that came before had been merely existing; and you were happy too, Hubert, my darling—you were happy too. Be patient—I am coming to the end—the end—the end of it all. One afternoon I was tired. Hubert took his gun and went for a stroll up the river-side. 'I shall not be long,' he said, as he kissed me; 'not long.' But the time went on and he did not come. I saw the tea all neatly laid, and some fish that he had caught the day before laid ready to broil. There was honey, and spiced cake, and all the things he loved best. Then I set out to meet him. The river ran like molten silver; the little wagtails wavered about in the shallows; the wild flowers bordered my pathway. Once I sat down to enjoy it all—the calm, the shine, the beauty—and my thoughts ran wild. Could this be really the hard-working nurse—the woman who had fought such a desperate fight with fate and fortune—going to meet the man she loved, who was hers—all hers—going through the beautiful sunlit world, with her glad heart beating high? I sauntered slowly on; then I saw him—Hubert—my husband—but—what a foolish blunder I had made!—he was on the other side the river. I stood still, looking

wistfully across, and then he waved his hand to me, with a strange gesture which had in it more of farewell than greeting. He was standing by a railing, and I saw his figure plainly against the bole of a great tree. I made a sign indicating that I would hurry home and be there to meet him. He made no answering gesture, but turned his head slowly to look after me as I moved quickly on. I passed behind a thicket, and when I reached the open he was gone.

"'He has taken some short cut,' I thought, and walked the faster.

"When I reached home there was no one there; the kettle was singing on the tiny hob; the room had such a happy, home-like look. I had gathered some flowers as I came along, and I set them in a glass upon the table. Then I sat and waited, singing softly to myself to pass the time away. All the while they were bringing him home to me, carried on men's shoulders, cold and dead. They found him lying on the daisies and the kingcups which were red with his life-blood. His gun had gone off, the trigger caught by a bramble. He had been dead a long, long while when they found him; but his yearning had drawn him to me, his spirit had burst its fetters, Heaven had permitted me that one supreme moment of a parting greeting. I remember hearing my own shrieks and thinking that some one else cried. I remember the touch of the cold face against my own, and then I think I must have gone mad, for it is all a blank. When I woke I was in the old familiar scene, a hospital ward. I asked for a mirror and they gave me one. My hair, the one real beauty I possessed, was gone; and my head was swathed in hideous bandages. Later on I learned that I—I who had once struggled for daily bread—was rich. I remember an old man coming to see me, and hurling at me bitter reproaches and cruel jibes; but they did not hurt. I remember others speaking words of kindness and comfort; but they did not heal; and ever since that time we have dwelt together in solitude, my past and I. It is all I have, that dear and beautiful past. I hoard it up and garner it close, letting none share it with me. I am very jealous over it—very tender over it; I have shared it with none until now."

Then Madam bent down and clasped Florrie in her tender arms.

"You must not weep like that, my child," she said, murmuring her words as a dove coos to its mate; "see how sad you are making Grip—poor Grip."

Indeed, Grip was in sad case, burrowing to get at the girl's hidden face; making little whining noises in himself, and wagging his wee bit of tail in an agony of sympathy and sorrow.

"See," said Madam, detaching a tiny golden key from her chain, "go up into my room—you know the picture above my table, open the case, and look at—what—I—have lost."

Blinded with tears, Florrie went her way, lingering long to look upon the dark and tender face of the man who had been so madly loved, so passionately mourned. Grip, who, of course, had followed, stood looking gravely at the picture too, his head on one side, his ears well at attention. Then, seeing that his companion was weeping, he stood on end and licked her fingers. Surely he must have wondered what it was that made people so sad when they looked at that picture on the wall.

In silence Florrie gave back the golden key; in silence took her place once more at Madam's feet.

"My child," said Madam, "I am sorry to have made you look so sad. Life is not all sad, even when the desire of our eyes is taken from us. See how beautiful the world is. That is still ours—God-given, to comfort us—and there is so much to do. I have a friend—an old, old friend who manages my income for me—my needs here are small, and, as I told you, my husband left me rich. This friend searches out for me the sad, the sorrowful, the needy—all who stumble for lack of a helping hand. He writes out these stories of poverty and misfortune, and once a year he brings these records to me. They are sad enough reading, but they are precious. I think to myself as I pore over them, 'Hubert is doing this; Hubert is helping all these sad ones. One day I shall have a good account to give of my stewardship.' Meanwhile, life for me means waiting; for, Florrie—oh, my dear! I shall see my darling yet again, on the other side the River."

The next day the Vicar and his wife and their niece Florrie went to the sea for a month. The Vicar said that "the lassie wanted a change, to make the roses bloom in her cheeks again." And, indeed, she was a pale lassie enough was pretty Florrie, and in her eyes a haunted look as of one who has looked on sorrow.

The elasticity of youth and the keen sea breezes did their work, and Florrie was beginning to look forward to the return home, and, more than anything else, to hurrying down through the woods to the Red Farm, when she received a letter from Susan Garland.

"DEAR LADY,—It is now my sorrowful duty to tell you that Madam has gone. She went like a flash, and she said you were to have the purple-bell fuchsia that she trained so lovely with her own fingers. The little old gentleman he came down two days afterwards and took away all her things, except the fuchsias. The place is silent as the grave, and mother has cried her eyes out. So have I. We had another sorrow, too, on top. Grip, he laid out straight when Madam was gone, after being shut up by main force in the fruit-room for nigh upon four hours, and he turned from his food, and was a very sad dog, I can tell you. Then he went; we know not how, nor yet where, nor can hear at all.

"Hoping that this will find you well, as it leaves me at present, I beg to remain, yours sorrowfully,

"SUSAN GARLAND."

"I know! I know!" cried Florrie, as she crushed poor Susie's letter in her hand. "She wanted her dear dead past all to herself again. She told me the story of it all because I teased her so, and then—she could not bear it!"

These things happened a long time ago, and no one in Redway has ever heard anything more of Madam, nor of Grip either. Love taught the little feet cunning, and be sure Grip found her somewhere.

Nothing in life is wasted, and the Idyll of the Farm so deepened the character and chastened the ideals of Florrie May that her life was blessed exceedingly to those about her.